Audit of Political Engagement 9. The 2012 Report: Part Two The media and politics

Ruth Fox, Matt Korris, Colin Hay, Gerry Stoker

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The Audit of Political Engagement is the only annual health check on our democratic system. Now in its ninth year, each Audit measures the 'political pulse' of the nation, providing a unique benchmark to gauge public opinion across Great Britain with regard to the political system.

The second part of this year's Audit focuses on public attitudes to politics and the media. The media claim to play a critical role in our democracy, shining a bright light on those in power on behalf of the public. But in the context of that place in our democracy, what role and responsibilities, if any, do they have in relation to political engagement?

This report is an invaluable source of information and debate for all those who are concerned with the health of our democratic system.

The Hansard Society is the UK's leading, independent, non-partisan political research and education charity. We aim to strengthen parliamentary democracy and encourage greater public involvement in politics.

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Contents

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Table of Figures

Preface

The annual Audit of Political Engagement is one of the Hansard Society's most important publications and this year, marking a departure from past practice, we have published the report in two parts.

As ever we are grateful to the House of Commons and the Cabinet Office for funding the Audit project and to the Economic and Social Research Council who funded the qualitative research for an associated project on which this report also draws.

This second part of Audit 9 addresses the timely and topical subject of the role of the media in our democracy. At the Leveson Inquiry the views of leading celebrities, politicians, journalists and academics have all been heard. But what do the public think about the relationship between politics and the media?

Perhaps surprisingly, after the turmoil of the last two years, public satisfaction with media reporting of politics appears to have improved since we last looked at it in Audit 7. Among those who are dissatisfied, the most prevalent causes of discontent appear rooted in perceptions that media reporting of politics is either limited, partial or designed to manipulate.

The public clearly have serious concerns about the media's role – and particularly that of the print press – in conveying information and knowledge about politics, and in performing its watchdog role of holding politicians and government to account. Television coverage fares better than other forms of media on this score but even here only four or five of every 10 members of the public think it helps the public learn about politics, is fair in its representation of politicians and does a good job of holding politicians to account.

Despite doubts about some of the content, the public have little doubt about the importance of the media in our political system. They overwhelmingly believe that the media is influential on voters, and more than half of the public think it influences politicians too. Three-quarters of respondents (74%) believe that the media has some influence over how people vote, with 29% saying it has a great deal of influence.

The Leveson Inquiry is focusing interest as never before on the media, politics and the public. It is hoped that the evidence provided by this research will make an important contribution to the debate.

Lord Grocott
Chair, Hansard Society

Executive summary

The media plays a vital role in our democracy. Most citizens are observers of, rather than active participants in, the political process and the media is the principal conduit by which they conduct that observation of politics. It is therefore crucial in providing access to, and information for, citizens about politics. It is also a key means by which the government, MPs and other sources of influence and power are held to account.

It is because of this role that the print media claims a right to freedom from regulation in the interests of democracy. However, if the media's coverage of the content and character of politics is such that it damages the public's capacity to engage in the political process then its role in our democracy may be as detrimental as it is beneficial.

Political media: sources, satisfaction and influence

- Television is overwhelmingly the most common channel of communication, with three-quarters of all respondents (75%) selecting it as their main source of political news and information. Tabloid newspapers (27%), radio (26%), news websites (20%), broadsheet newspapers (16%) and social media (6%) lag a long way behind.

- Satisfaction with media reporting of politics appears to have improved. Forty-five percent claim to be satisfied with media reporting of politics, compared to just 38% who said the same two years ago in Audit 7.

- Among those who are dissatisfied with the media coverage of politics the most prevalent causes of discontent are rooted in perceptions that media reporting is either limited, partial, or designed to manipulate.

- Tabloid newspapers are consistently identified by two-thirds of the public as displaying negative traits in their coverage of politics and politicians. They are believed to be significantly more likely than other media to be 'more interested in getting a story than telling the truth' (68%), to 'look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians' (63%) and to 'focus on negative stories about politics and politicians' (62%).

- Tabloid readers themselves strongly agree with the negative statements about their own newspapers of choice. Almost three-quarters (74%) of tabloid readers agree that their newspapers 'are more interested in getting a story than telling the truth', 71% that they 'focus on negative stories about politics and politicians', and 70% that they 'look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians'.

- Television coverage is perceived to be more likely than other media to 'help the public to learn about what is happening in politics' (55%), to be 'generally fair in their representation of politicians' (41%) and to 'do a good job of keeping politicians accountable for their conduct' (38%).

- Broadsheet newspapers are viewed much less negatively than tabloids, but not as positively as television in respect of their coverage of politics.

- The public overwhelmingly believes that the media is influential on voters, and more than half of the public think it influences politicians too. Three-quarters of respondents (74%) believe that the media has some influence over how people vote, with 29% saying it has 'a great deal' of influence, and 45% that it has 'a fair amount'. Only 3% think that the media has no influence at all on the public's electoral decisions.

Knowledge and interest

- Only 5% of broadsheet readers and 11% of mid-market readers claim to have no interest in politics at all, compared to the national average of 24%. Twenty-six percent of red-top readers say they have no interest, a greater lack of interest than readers of local newspapers (19%), but lower than those who do not read papers at all (37%).

- Broadsheet readers and mid-market readers are much more likely to feel knowledgeable about politics than the public generally, (70% and 55% respectively). They claim far greater levels of knowledge than readers of no papers at all (39%) who in turn claim more knowledge than red-top readers (35%).

- Broadsheet (3%), mid-market (6%) and local newspaper readers (12%) are less likely than the national average (15%) to claim to know nothing at all about politics, and red-top readers (18%) are more likely to do so.

Action and participation

- Broadsheet and mid-market readers are more likely than the national average to say that they will vote in the event of a general election (62% and 64% respectively). Both local paper (47%) and red-top readers (44%) are closer to the national average (48%) whilst those who read no paper at all (35%) are significantly below it. Of non-readers, 25% say they are certain not to vote.

- Broadsheet (71%), red-top (75%) and local paper readers (76%) agree that referendums should be used more often to determine important questions, close to the national average (72%). In contrast, mid-market readers are more inclined to view referendums favourably (83%).

Efficacy and satisfaction

- Forty-two percent of broadsheet readers think that the system of governing works extremely or mainly well. Mid-market readers are also more positive (34%) than the national average (24%). Those who read local papers or no papers at all are marginally less positive than the average (21% each), but they are much more satisfied with the system of governing than red-top readers, only 14% of whom think the system works reasonably well.

- Readers of broadsheet (37%), mid-market (37%), red-top (36%) and local newspapers (35%) are all equally confident about their capacity to effect change in the way the country is run. Readers of no paper at all (24%), however, are much less optimistic about the likely efficacy of their involvement in politics.

- Broadsheet readers are much more likely than average (56%) to think that by getting involved locally they can make a difference (72% agree). Mid-market (60%), red-top (59%) and local newspaper (56%) readers have similar, roughly average perspectives. Readers of no paper at all (45%) are least likely to sense any capacity to make a difference.

Civic and political involvement

- Broadsheet and mid-market readers are more likely to feel influential with regard to national decision-making: 21% and 18% respectively feel they have at least some influence. But red-top (11%) and local newspaper readers (11%) mirror the national average (12%) and readers of no newspaper at all feel the least influential (7%).

- Broadsheet readers (36%) are more likely than average to feel they have at least some influence with regard to decisions in their local area but mid-market readers feel a lower level of influence (28%). Local newspaper readers (23%) and red-top readers (21%) are close to the national average (24%) and, readers of no newspaper at all claim to feel the least influence (18%).

- Broadsheet readers are much more likely to want to be involved locally (54%) and nationally (46%) than the average (38% and 33% respectively). Mid-market readers (39%) rate a bit above the average in their desire for national involvement, while red-top (34%) and local (30%) paper readers' desire for such involvement is broadly in line with that of the general population. Mid-market (41%), red-top (41%) and local (38%) newspaper readers all broadly mirror the average desire for local involvement. On both measures, however, readers of no papers at all have the lowest level of desire for local (31%) and national involvement (28%).

Perceptions of Parliament

- Broadsheet (68%) and mid-market (51%) readers are much more likely to say that they feel knowledgeable about Parliament than the general public (40%). Readers of local newspapers (38%) broadly mirror the national average. Significantly less

knowledgeable about Parliament are those who read no papers at all (32%) and red-top readers (31%).

- Broadsheet (90%) and mid-market readers (82%) are significantly more likely to agree that Parliament is essential to democracy compared to the general population (66%). Readers of local newspapers (67%) mirror the national average, while red-top readers' (59%) perception of Parliament is a little below average as are readers of no paper at all (56%).

- Broadsheet and mid-market readers are much more likely to agree that Parliament holds government to account (52% and 50% respectively) compared to the public generally (38%). Local newspaper readers (42%) are marginally more likely than the average to agree. Red-top readers (36%) are about average, while readers of no papers at all (27%) are much less likely to agree.

- Forty percent of mid-market and 38% of broadsheet readers agree that Parliament encourages public involvement in politics; both ranking well above the national average (30%). Local newspaper (31%) and red-top readers (29%) virtually mirror the national population, but readers of no paper at all are less likely to agree (24%).

- Broadsheet (68%) and mid-market readers (65%) are also more likely than the average to agree that Parliament debates and makes decisions about 'issues that matter to me'. Local newspaper readers (45%) and red-top readers (44%) fall a little below the national average (49%), while readers of no newspaper at all are much less likely to agree (39%).

- Broadsheet (54%) and mid-market readers (54%) are more likely to prioritise Parliament's role in 'representing the UK's national interests' than the public generally (40%). Readers of local newspapers (39%) and red-tops (37%) are around the national average, while readers of no paper at all (32%) assign less priority to this role.

- Red-top (32%) and local newspaper readers (31%) are marginally more likely than mid-market (29%) and broadsheet (26%) readers to consider representing the views of local communities to be important. On this issue readers of no newspapers at all (26%) and broadsheet consumers have a rare meeting of minds.

- Broadsheet readers (23%) are much more likely and mid-market readers (17%) a little more likely to prioritise Parliament's role in 'scrutinising proposed new laws' than the general public (13%). Readers of local newspapers (13%) mirror the national view, but red-top readers (9%) and readers of no newspaper at all (9%) are less inclined to agree that this is a priority for Parliament.

Newspapers and political engagement

- There is little evidence that red-top newspapers stimulate the political engagement of their readers. Red-top only readers are significantly more disengaged from politics than readers of other newspapers: they are less interested in and feel less

knowledgeable about politics, are less certain to vote, are less satisfied with the system of governing than the average, and are considerably less satisfied than broadsheet or mid-market readers.

- Broadsheet readers are more likely to be politically engaged and feel they can exercise influence in the political process.

- Tabloids do not appear to advance the political citizenship of their readers, relative even to those who read no newspaper at all. Tabloid readers are no more positive than non-readers about their capacity to influence decision-making, and are actually less likely than non-readers to believe that the system of governing is working at least reasonably well.

- In contrast, reading broadsheet media makes citizens much more likely than both tabloid readers and non-readers alike to engage with and participate in politics, and to be more positive about the governing system and their own capacity to influence it.

- Tabloid-only readers are twice as likely to agree with a negative, cynical 'stealth' view of politics than readers of no paper at all. They are not just less politically engaged but they are consuming media that reinforces their negative evaluation of politics, thereby contributing to a fatalistic and cynical attitude to democracy and their own role in it.

The media and political engagement: a democratic responsibility?

- The media – particularly the print press and specifically tabloids – do not appear to greatly benefit our democracy from the perspective of nourishing political engagement. Indeed, in this respect, the press, particularly the tabloids, appear not to be living up to the importance of their role in our democracy.

- In the opinion of most members of the public, the press are simply not effective at conveying information and knowledge to their readers, nor at performing their crucial watchdog role of holding politicians and government to account.

- Consistent with the complexity and differentiated character of the public's views, the media should bear some responsibility, commensurate with the extent of its influence, for the consequences of its coverage on the content and character of the democratic process and the willingness of citizens to engage in it.

- The public's sense of the media's portrayal of politics and its role and influence upon our democratic political culture is both mixed and highly differentiated. The response to the question of media regulation should therefore be similarly nuanced.

- Given the influence that the public thinks the media has, and the demonstrable link between readership and political engagement, that power and influence should be balanced with some form of independent, public interest regulatory framework –

supported by a more effective sanctions regime – which recognises and is designed to stimulate the responsibilities of the press alongside its rights within our democracy.

- Such a framework must enable the press to develop informative, rich and entertaining content, but should also require them to give greater thought to purveying context and therefore balance in their coverage of politics. It should also strive to encourage the press to think more deeply about the responsibilities of their 'watchdog' role, how they hold political actors to account, how they explain the political process, and how they can foster and support a more politically engaged citizenry.

1. Introduction

In previous Audits of Political Engagement the media has consistently emerged as the institution that the British public believes has most impact on people's everyday lives. Over the course of the Audit lifecycle, local councils, business, the civil service, Parliament, the European Union, even the Prime Minister and the Cabinet have all been perceived by the public to be much less influential.[1]

But have the turbulent events of the last year had any impact on public attitudes? The media – particularly the print press – are currently subject to unprecedented levels of scrutiny following revelations that the phone messages of hundreds of celebrities, politicians and victims of crime had been hacked over several years by journalists at the News of the World and allegedly at other newspapers. The proposed acquisition of BSkyB by News Corporation, and the way this and other similar regulatory matters have been handled by successive ministers, also raise difficult questions about the excessive and unaccountable influence of media proprietors and the capricious way in which they may use that influence for their own commercial ends through a timely endorsement of a particular party or politician. By extension it is implied that politicians have been willing to court editors and proprietors – through a willing ear and a blind eye if not through explicit policy favours – in return for more favourable coverage in certain newspapers.

A public inquiry was established, headed by Lord Justice Leveson, to examine the culture, practices and ethics of the media, and the relationship between the press and the public, politicians and the police, with a remit to make recommendations about the future of press regulation and governance. At the time of writing the Inquiry is on-going, but it is already clear that the contours of the relationship between politicians and the media are being redrawn, and the outcome of the Inquiry might fundamentally alter the future terms of trade for the press in the UK.

As a key means by which the government, MPs and other sources of influence and power are held to account, the media plays a vital role in our democracy. Indeed, it is precisely because of that role that the print media claims a right to freedom from regulation in the interests of democracy. But if the media's coverage of the content and character of politics is such that it damages the public's capacity to engage in the political process then its role in our democracy may be as detrimental as it is beneficial. In such circumstances, the vital nature of its role must surely be subject to greater scrutiny and accountability.

[1] See, for example, Hansard Society (2011), *Audit of Political Engagement 8: The 2011 Report* (London: Hansard Society), pp.89-90, and Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7: The 2010 Report* (London: Hansard Society), pp.96-97.

It is this issue – the impact of the media on public perceptions of and engagement in the political process, and by extension on the vitality of our democracy – that we explore in this second part of the 2012 Audit. At the Leveson Inquiry the views of leading politicians, journalists, academics and an array of celebrities are being heard. But what do the public think about the relationship between politics and the media?

How does the media influence a citizen's cognitive processes by which they come to think about politics? To what extent are their attitudes towards politics really influenced by what they watch and read? Are certain forms of media more likely than others to expand their political horizons and stimulate an individual's sense of their own political capacity? What difference, if any, does media consumption – specifically newspaper readership – have on the public's propensity to be politically engaged? Does, for example, a citizen's choice of newspaper in any way correlate with their levels of interest in, knowledge of and satisfaction with the political process? Does it affect their propensity to vote or their willingness to get involved in decision-making locally or nationally? Or is media consumption more likely to corrode the political process by having a deleterious impact on the public's capacity to be politically engaged citizens?

Now in its ninth year, the Audit of Political Engagement is an annual health check on our democratic system. Measuring the 'political pulse' of the nation, it provides a unique benchmark to gauge public opinion across Great Britain with regard to politics and the political process. Based on the results of an opinion poll survey conducted by TNS-BMRB in December 2011 amongst a representative sample of adults in Great Britain, the Audit explores public attitudes to a range of indicators that track knowledge of and interest in the political system; the degree of public action and participation in politics; and the public's sense of efficacy and satisfaction with the democratic process. A number of core questions are asked in each poll, enabling us to track responses from year to year and so chart the direction and magnitude of change over the course of the Audit lifecycle. The core survey is traditionally supplemented by a number of additional questions that explore an issue or theme of topical interest such as the constitution, political participation and citizenship, MPs and Parliament, and civic engagement.

In addition to the quantitative surveys, this report also draws on the findings of 14 focus groups held across the country between November 2011 and March 2012 exploring public attitudes to politics and the democratic process.[2]

This year marks a departure from past practice as the Audit has been split into two parts. Part one provided a detailed analysis of the core indicators of political engagement and explored public attitudes to Parliament and civic engagement locally and nationally. It also set out the political context that may have helped to shape and define public attitudes and behaviours. As such this report should be read in conjunction with part one. The Audit has previously only touched on the role of the media in relation to political engagement, providing limited historic data for comparison. Unlike recent Audit reports, this one therefore does not provide much by way of time-series analysis and benchmarking; it focuses on exploring current public attitudes to the media and politics.

[2] ESRC funded project RES-00-22-4441, 'Anti-politics: Characterising and accounting for political disaffection'. See Appendix E for more details about the focus groups.

The following chapter draws specifically on the December 2011 Audit opinion poll results to analyse the public's sources of political information, the influence of different forms of media and the differential impact of current affairs and satirical programmes. It examines the level of public satisfaction with the way that the media reports politics, and the public's perception of how politics and politicians are portrayed through the prism of both negative and positive coverage. Finally, it explores the public's perception of the media's influence on both voters and politicians.

Chapter three assesses the impact that news readership has on a citizen's propensity to be politically engaged. Drawing on the December 2011 opinion poll results, this chapter explores the relationship between news readership and a citizen's level of knowledge and interest in politics; their degree of action and participation in it; their sense of efficacy and satisfaction with the political system; and their perceived influence over and desire for involvement in local and national decision-making. Finally, it reflects on the impact of newspaper readership on public perceptions of the importance and relevance of Parliament and its role and functions in our democracy. Using statistical segmentation techniques, this chapter also provides an alternative perspective on the complex relationship between media consumption and public perceptions of and engagement in politics. It identifies five groups among the public – 'enthusiasts', 'critics', the 'unconcerned', the 'semi-detached', and the 'disconnected' – that have distinct attitudes and characteristics in terms of their views on political media and their own patterns of political behaviour.

The fourth and final chapter explores whether different forms of media are more likely to foster the political engagement of their readers. In addition to the results of the December 2011 opinion poll, this chapter draws on the results of the same survey which was run again in January 2012. This enabled us to combine two samples in order to conduct more robust analysis of the media related issues. Using a multivariate statistical technique known as 'logistic regression analysis' we have sought to identify and isolate the independent impact of media consumption, identifying in particular whether readership of certain types of newspaper has a disproportionate effect on political engagement if all other factors making up the public profile are the same. It particularly focuses on comparisons between broadsheet and tabloid newspaper readers and examines how tabloid media may be contributing to a negative sense of fatalism among their readership about the political process and their role in it. In light of these findings, it considers what the media, particularly the tabloids, are accomplishing in relation to politics and by extension what responsibility, if any, they have towards furthering political engagement in our democracy.

Finally, the report concludes with a series of appendices that set out the methodology for the quantitative and qualitative research used in this study. Appendix A describes the methodology used to collect the data for the opinion poll surveys, including an explanation of the statistical reliability of the reported findings. Appendix B presents the topline results of the ninth political engagement poll from December 2011 in tabular format. The segmentation profiles are detailed in Appendix C, and the logistic regression tables in Appendix D. Details of the timing, location and demographic make-up of the 14 focus groups are set out in Appendix E.

Most members of the public understand the print press through the prism of 'tabloid' and 'broadsheet' newspapers. However, the stable of tabloid newspapers is quite broad and from a journalistic and commercial perspective some newspapers can be regarded as more mid-market in format and reach. For the purposes of clarity and consistency, throughout the report the following categorisation of newspaper titles has therefore been applied.

Figure 1: Newspaper category by title

Type of newspaper	Newspaper title
Red-top	Sun, Mirror, People, Daily Star, Daily Record, Sunday Mirror, Sunday People, Sunday Sport
Mid-market	Daily Express, Daily Mail, Sunday Express, Mail on Sunday
Tabloid	Red-top and mid-market papers combined
Broadsheet	Daily Telegraph, Guardian, Financial Times, Times, Independent, Sunday Telegraph, Sunday Times, Observer, Independent on Sunday

Where tabloids are referenced in this report, the statistics therefore include newspapers that fall within both the red-top and mid-market categories. These remain distinct from broadsheets in that both red-top and mid-market titles are less hard-edged in their approach to news; they are driven to a much greater degree by stories designed to entertain with a greater focus on human interest and celebrity oriented articles. As will become clear, they are also quite distinct from broadsheets with regard to political engagement.

Following publication of each Audit report, the full dataset is made available on the Hansard Society website (www.hansardsociety.org.uk) in order that others may use it for research purposes. It is also lodged at the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex for the same purpose.

Public engagement is a key strand of the Hansard Society's research programme and we will therefore be undertaking further work linked to and derived from the results of this and previous Audits in the future. Reports emanating from this further research will also be published on our website.

2. Political media: sources, satisfaction and influence

Since the Audit began in 2003 the study has consistently revealed that most citizens are observers of, rather than active participants in, the political process and that the media is the principal conduit by which they conduct that observation of politics. To understand how people's attitudes towards politics are formed, it is therefore important to understand what their sources of political news and information are.

Where do people get their political news and information?

As Figure 2 demonstrates, television is overwhelmingly the most common channel of communication, with three-quarters of all respondents (75%) selecting it as their main source of political news and information. Other key sources – tabloid newspapers (27%), radio (26%), news websites (20%), broadsheet newspapers (16%) and social media (6%) – lag a long way behind.

Figure 2: Sources of political information

Q Which of these are your main sources of political news and information? You can select up to three.

	%
Television	75
Tabloid newspapers	27
Radio	26
News websites	20
Broadsheet newspapers	16
Friends and/or family	10
Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)	6
Leaflets and magazines produced by political parties	4
Leaflets and magazines produced by charities or pressure groups	3
Charity and pressure group websites	1
Teachers and lecturers	1
Political party websites	1
Political blogs	1
Something else	1
Not applicable, I don't follow political news	8
Don't know	3

Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

Sixteen percent of citizens identify informal channels of communication provided by friends and family or social media as one of their main sources of political news and information. In contrast, only 5% of respondents identify direct communications from political parties, either from leaflets or websites, as such a source. These results highlight the degree to which political parties struggle to cut through in developing direct channels of communication with the electorate, and underline how dependent they remain on formal media outlets.

Fewer 18-24 year olds report television as their main source of information about politics (61% compared to the national average of 75%) and this age group are more likely than average to say they don't follow political news at all (16% compared to 8% generally). They and the 25-34 year old age group are more likely to get their political news from a broader range of other sources beyond television, newspapers or radio than other age groups (51% compared to the 38% national average). These sources include websites, party and charity websites, social media, leaflets and magazines, family and friends, teachers and lecturers. Those in social classes AB (51%) and those from BME backgrounds (55%) are also more likely than average to obtain political news from a range of other sources.

Even combining the results of those who cite tabloid and broadsheet newspapers as one of their top three sources of political news (40% combined) still positions the print press at barely more than half the reach of television. However, the print press combined is still more widely used than the internet for political news, with just over a quarter of respondents (28%) identifying either news websites, social media, political party websites or blogs as one of their main sources of political information. Of course, cross-pollination across the media means that the political coverage and commentary in the print press, television news and on the internet, will all influence each other, helping to set the agenda and shape the interpretation of events.

Interestingly, however, respondents who claimed newspapers as their main source of political information were more likely to have voted at the last general election (77%) than those who identified television (69%) or online sources (67%) as their prime source of political news. To some extent, demographic characteristics explain this, for both age and social class are significant drivers of political engagement, including a greater propensity to vote. People who rely on newspapers as a primary source of political news and information tend to be older (with an average age of 52, compared to an average age of 45 for non-newspaper readers), and to belong to the higher social grades (51% of those in social classes AB cite newspapers as a source versus 38% of those in social classes C1, C2, and DE). Despite younger age groups (those in the 18-24, 25-34 and 35-44 age brackets) having average levels of broadsheet readership, they are less likely to name broadsheets as their main source of political news and information (11-12% across the three age brackets compared to the average of 17%). This is in large part because they gather their political news from a broader range of sources. Those in the older age groups (65-74 and 75+) are most likely to cite tabloid newspapers as their main source of information (37% each compared to the average of 28%). On the basis of the individual newspapers they declare they read, a large proportion of these are also readers of mid-market newspapers as well as red-tops.

When asked to define their newspaper readership by identifying the specific titles they read (as set out in Figure 1), the most commonly read titles the public chose were red-tops (35%), followed by mid-market newspapers (24%) and then broadsheets and local papers (21% each respectively). Just over a quarter of the public, 27%, report reading no newspaper at all. Red-tops are predominantly read by those in social classes C2 and DE (43% each). Mid-market newspapers are read by an even social spread: 29% of ABs, 28% of C1s and 28% of C2s, but fewer DEs (17%). Unsurprisingly, exactly half of those in social classes AB (50%) read a broadsheet newspaper, but only 29% of C1s, 14% of C2s and just 10% of DEs. C2s are noticeably more likely to read local newspapers than other groups; 28% of them do so compared to the 21% national average. Those aged 35-44 have the lowest levels of newspaper readership: 37% of them read no paper at all. In contrast, older age groups tend to read mid-market titles: 42% of those aged 65-74 and 32% of those aged 75+ claim to do so, compared to the national average of 24%.

The influence of television: current affairs vs. satire

Given the overwhelming influence of television, what kind of programmes, beyond the regular news slots, are citizens getting their political news and information from? Younger citizens, for example, increasingly consume forms of political news via satirical chat and comedy shows. Our focus groups across the country also found that many members of the public see core aspects of political activity – Prime Minister's Questions in particular – not as a political event but as a form of entertainment. The 'yah-boo' nature of politics, particularly in the House of Commons Chamber, is seen as a form of theatre or comedy show. Is this reflected more widely in the kind of programmes that people obtain their political news from?

When those who cite television as a main source of political news or information were presented with a mixed list of traditional current affairs and satirical programmes, then Have I Got News for You topped the list, marginally ahead of Question Time with Mock the Week in third place.

Figure 3: Political television programmes watched

Q Do you watch any of the following (when they're on)?

	%
Have I Got News for You	42
Question Time	41
Mock the Week	30
Election coverage	22
Prime Minister's Questions	20
Party political broadcast	15
Leaders' debates	9
Daily Politics	9
This Week	5
None of these	27

Base: All using television as a main source of political news or information (862)

Twenty-two percent said they watched election coverage when it was being broadcast and one in five people (20%) claim to watch Prime Minister's Questions but only 15% watch party political broadcasts. However, just over a quarter said they do not watch any of the programmes listed (27%).

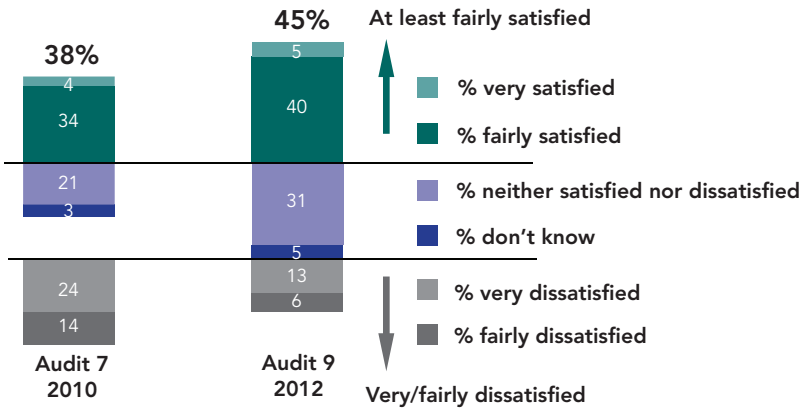
Of those who watched the traditional current affairs programmes, significantly more of them (81%) claimed to have voted in the last general election compared to those who watched satirical programmes (71%). However, when the characteristics of those who watch either, or both Have I Got News For You and Mock the Week, are compared with those of the rest of the population, one finds, perhaps not surprisingly, that as a group those who watch these satirical shows are noticeably more engaged in politics across all the core indicators of political engagement than those who do not watch them. Exposure to more cynical messages about the failings of politics, politicians, and the political system generally does not appear, for example, to dent their satisfaction with the system of governing (29%) compared to those who do not watch these programmes (21%).[3] It is clear then that although satire watchers are receiving a negative, often cynical, perspective on politics they are nonetheless quite politically engaged. This does not mean that satirical programmes are good for political engagement, nor does it prove that there is no detrimental effect of consuming this negative portrayal, but if there are negative effects from satirical programmes they do not prevent the audience from being more engaged than average.

Satisfaction with media reporting of politics

Perhaps surprisingly, despite the events of the last few years, satisfaction with media reporting of politics appears to have improved. Forty-five percent claim to be satisfied with media reporting of politics, compared to just 38% who said the same two years ago in Audit 7 (see Figure 4). That year 38% of the public reported that they were dissatisfied with media reporting of politics; this year that number has halved to just 19%.

Figure 4: Satisfaction with media reporting of politics

Q How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the media reports politics in the UK?



Base: c.1,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

[3] There is, however, no real difference in their views on the efficacy of getting involved in politics, where the views of those who watch satire (35%) and non-satire watchers (31%) are fairly similar. This reflects similar trends across all demographic characteristics (gender, age, social class etc.) where there is remarkable convergence of views across the population on the efficacy of involvement.

There has thus been a shift in attitudes, though the greatest movement is in the increased number of people who claim to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied or who simply have no view; the number of people falling into this category has increased from a fifth in Audit 7 to almost a third (31%) today.

A discernible change in attitudes can also be perceived when looking at the social class differences. In Audit 7, just 29% of ABs were satisfied with the media coverage of politics. This has now jumped by 21 percentage points to 50%. Even more significant is the 30 percentage point drop in their dissatisfaction rate which has declined to 27% from 57% in Audit 7. Looking at levels of satisfaction, there are now few differences between those from social classes AB (50%), C1 (49%) and C2 (46%). Those in social classes DE are outliers, with only 39% claiming to be satisfied with media coverage of politics. However, there have been modest decreases in dissatisfaction across those in social classes C1, C2 and DE, all of whom have seen a fall of around 10 percentage points. But of these, only C1s are more satisfied this year (by 9 points); C2s and DEs show no such increase.

Dissatisfaction has dropped for all age groups – by more than 10 percentage points for all groups except 18-24 year olds, and in most cases by 20 percentage points or more. The most dissatisfied groups are those aged 55-64 years of age (26% are dissatisfied compared to the national average of 19%). There has been no increase in satisfaction at the lower end of the age range (18-44 year olds). However, older age groups (45+) report an average increase in satisfaction of 11 percentage points.

It is difficult to categorically explain why there has been this positive change in public perceptions of the media, particularly at a time when so many other survey indicators have declined considerably in Audit 9 compared to previous years and when, given the controversies swirling around the media, one might reasonably have expected satisfaction levels to have also declined.

It may partly be explained by what the public understand 'politics' to be and how this is reported upon. Phone hacking, for example, need not be seen as an explicitly political issue in the way that the MPs' expenses scandal was not seen by a significant portion of the public to be a political issue in 2010. Then, although seven out of 10 people said they had discussed MPs' expenses with friends or family, there was a gap of 30 percentage points in the proportion who said they had discussed the expenses scandal and those who said they had discussed 'politics or political news'. It was as if, for many people, the MPs' expenses scandal was somehow entirely separate from 'politics'.[4] In similar vein, phone hacking, the controversy surrounding the BSkyB takeover, and general concern about media ethics may not be considered, by many members of the public, to fall into the category of politics or political news. Equally, it could be argued that as certain sections of the media have been as instrumental as any other individual or institution in uncovering and explaining the phone hacking saga and MPs' expenses, then the public are likely to look upon the sector in more benign fashion than might otherwise have been the case.

[4] Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7: The 2010 Report* (London: Hansard Society), pp.31-34.

Some light, can, however, be shed on the views of those citizens who say they are dissatisfied with media reporting of politics. As Figure 5 shows, almost half believe that the media 'don't present the full facts' (47%), over a third that they 'make little or no attempt to present a story in a balanced way' (40%), and just over a quarter that they 'try to make people unnecessarily scared or angry' (27%).

Figure 5: Reasons for dissatisfaction with media coverage of politics

Q Is your dissatisfaction with the way the media reports politics related to the following? Would you say reports often...

	%
Don't present the full facts	47
Make little or no attempt to present a story in a balanced way	40
Try to make people unnecessarily scared or angry	27
Don't explain the matter they're discussing in a clear way	19
Make little or no effort to report positive political news	14
Are presented in a condescending way	10
Contain nothing of interest to me, my family or my work	10
Use technical language and terms people find hard to understand	8
Make little or no attempt to explain why this should matter to me	7
Make light of serious matters	6
None of these	6
Don't know	5

Base: All adults aged 18 or above who are dissatisfied with media reporting of politics (220)

As Figure 5 demonstrates, among those who are dissatisfied with the media coverage of politics the most prevalent causes of discontent are rooted in perceptions that media reporting is either limited, partial, or designed to manipulate. Here, dissatisfied respondents from the higher social grades are significantly more likely to cite concerns about misleading reporting than are those in the lower social grades (84% of dissatisfied ABC1s, compared to 57% of dissatisfied C2DEs).

Media coverage of politics and politicians: positive and negative portrayals

A regular criticism of the media generally, but particularly in relation to politics, is that it focuses on negative, often cynical stories, presents information in a biased or partial way, and sheds more heat than light on the political process.

'You never ever really hear positive things about politicians in general. You hardly ever hear……politics and positivity don't go together. I can't remember the last time I heard a positive thing about a politician. Clinton, whomever, scandal. Margaret Thatcher. You hardly ever hear good news – so it's probably true that good news doesn't sell.'

Male participant, London focus group, November 2011

To test this hypothesis, and the public's perception of the sources of media they themselves consume, respondents were randomly presented with a list of six statements – three positive and three negative – about media coverage of politics and asked whether they thought they applied to (i) broadsheet newspapers, (ii) tabloid newspapers, (iii) television news programmes or (iv) radio news programmes. The six statements were:

Positive

- They do a good job of keeping politicians accountable for their conduct
- They are generally fair in their representation of politicians
- They help the public to learn about what is happening in politics

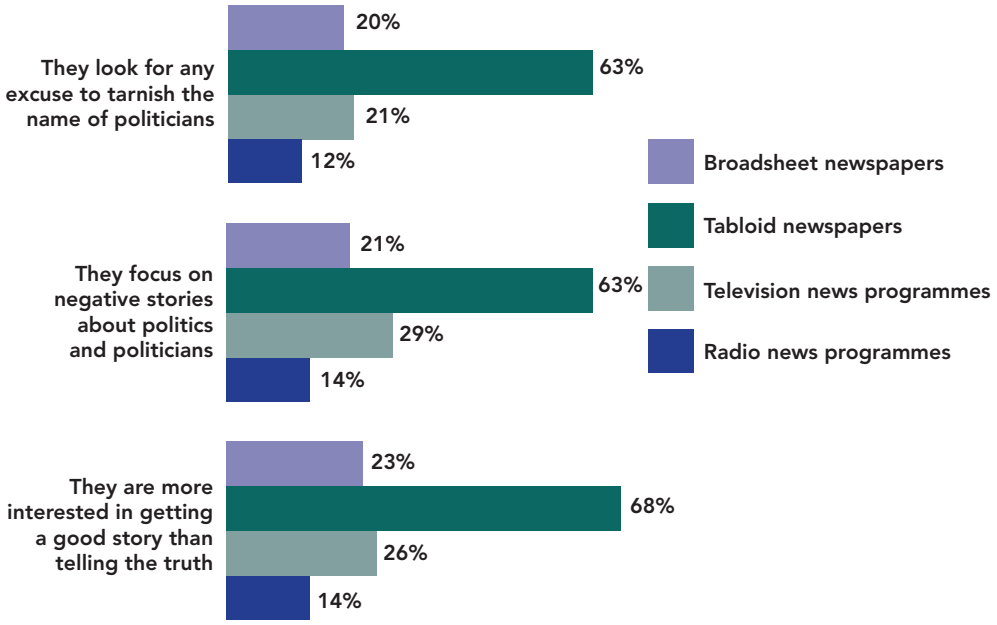
Negative

- They look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians
- They focus on negative stories about politics and politicians
- They are more interested in getting a story than telling the truth

As Figure 6 shows, tabloid newspapers are consistently identified by two-thirds of the public as displaying negative traits in their coverage of politics and politicians. Tabloids are believed to be significantly more likely than other media to be 'more interested in getting a story than telling the truth' (68%), to 'look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians' (63%) and to 'focus on negative stories about politics and politicians' (63%). Tabloids are three times more likely to be perceived to be negative in their approach to the coverage of politics than are the other forms of media.

Figure 6: Negative perceptions of media coverage of politics

Q Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statements apply to



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

Those in social classes AB are the most likely to disapprove of tabloid coverage of politics, with three-quarters or more agreeing with each of the negative statements. Likewise at least two-thirds of C1s and C2s agree with each of the negative statements about tabloids. In contrast, DEs are the least likely social class to hold negative views about tabloids, but even amongst this group at least half agree with each statement.

Readers of any newspaper are more likely than average to agree with the negative statements about the tabloids and readers of no papers at all are, perhaps unsurprisingly, less likely to agree. Perhaps the most notable finding, however, is that tabloid readers themselves strongly agree with the negative statements about their own newspapers of choice; indeed they are more likely than the national average for all three statements to agree that the tabloids are negative in their approach. Almost three-quarters (74%) of tabloid readers agree that their newspapers 'are more interested in getting a story than telling the truth', 71% that they 'focus on negative stories about politics and politicians', and 70% that they 'look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians'.

Looking at the responses to all three negative statements collectively, a quarter of all respondents could be firmly categorised as tabloid media critics (26%); people who identified the tabloids with all three of the negative statements and none of the other forms of media with any of them. A greater proportion of red-top readers are tabloid critics (38%), while average numbers of broadsheet and mid-market readers (both 28%) fall into the same category.

Only 4% of respondents felt that all three statements could apply equally to all four forms of media, and a similar proportion (5%) believed that none of the three negative statements applied to any of the media.

Tabloid newspapers also score well below television and broadsheet newspapers on the positive measures relating to the media's role in holding politicians to account, their impartiality and their ability to inform, although their results for these three statements were rather closer to radio news programmes.

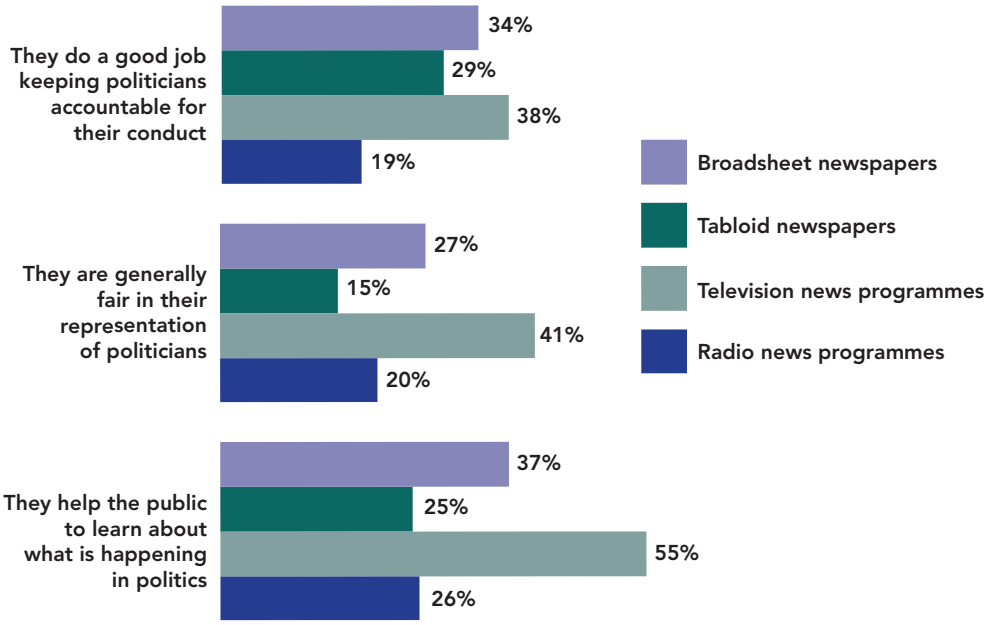
Television news programmes had the highest proportion of respondents in agreement with each of the three positive statements on the media's coverage of politics, with the highest margin of difference emerging in relation to television's learning and information role. Television coverage is perceived to be more likely than other media to 'help the public to learn about what is happening in politics' (55%), to be 'generally fair in their representation of politicians' (41%) and to 'do a good job of keeping politicians accountable for their conduct' (38%). This positive perception of television chimes with the findings of our focus groups where participants said that they appreciated the coverage because they felt they got the message more directly, from the 'horse's mouth', as interviews could not be spun (or were at least less likely to be spun) by an intermediary. Across the national population profile, this perception of television is broadly the same regardless of demographic differences such as age, gender or social class.

That said, although it performs better than the other forms of media, the results are hardly a ringing endorsement of television's approach. Only between four and five people in every

10 agree that television holds politicians accountable, is fair in its representation of politics and helps the public learn about what is happening in politics.

Figure 7: Positive perceptions of media coverage of politics

Q Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statements apply to



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

Broadsheet newspapers are viewed much less negatively than tabloids, but not as positively as television in respect of their coverage of politics. Unsurprisingly, broadsheet readers are much more likely to agree with the positive statements about broadsheet newspapers than are readers of other newspapers, and those in social classes AB are much more likely to perceive broadsheets' coverage of politics in a positive fashion than are those in social classes DE.

Just 15% agree that tabloid newspapers are 'generally fair in their representation of politicians', and only one-quarter (25%) that they 'help the public to learn about what is happening in politics'. Interestingly, however, the tabloid newspapers score a little better (29%) when it comes to their perceived efforts to hold politicians to account for their conduct. Here the gap between tabloids and broadsheet newspapers is just 5%, significantly closer than the gap between them in relation to the other statements. Those who read tabloid newspapers are more likely than average to agree that the positive statements about the portrayal of politics apply to tabloid newspapers, but only marginally.

Interestingly, although radio news coverage is the public's third most common source of political information, they do not appear to have strong views (either positive or negative)

about the nature of radio coverage of politics and politicians. Only 14% of respondents think that radio 'focuses on negative stories about politics and politicians', 12% that it looks 'for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians', and 14% that it is 'more interested in getting a story than telling the truth'. Radio scored best of all four forms of media in having the lowest scores in relation to all three negative statements about coverage of politics. However, it fared rather less well in relation to the positive statements about the portrayal of politics. Only 19% of respondents think that radio does a 'good job of keeping politicians accountable for their conduct', the worst score of all media in relation to this statement. And only 26% think that it helps the public 'learn about what is happening in politics', where it matches the tabloids for the joint worst score on this measure.

Just over half of the public (52%) could identify at least one branch of the media that they thought the positive statements about the coverage of politics applied to. In contrast, 6% could find nothing positive to say about the coverage of politics by any branch of the media.

The perceived influence of the media on voters and politicians

In Audit 8, 42% of the public claimed that the media was one of the two or three institutions they believed had most impact on people's everyday lives, surpassing the influence of local councils (40%), the UK Parliament (30%), business (28%), the European Union (16%), the civil service (15%) and the Prime Minister (13%).[5] Indeed, throughout the Audit lifecycle, the media is the institution that the British public consistently believes has the most impact on their life. Given these findings, what kind of influence do citizens believe the media actually has on politics, specifically on them as the electorate and on those they elect to office?

'The average person picks up the paper and just believes what they see and then that's what they vote for. What we read influences us, that's why places like China censor the media don't they?'

Female participant, London focus group, November 2011

As Figure 8 demonstrates, the public overwhelmingly believes that the media is influential on voters, and more than half of the public think it influences politicians too. Three-quarters of respondents (74%) believe that the media has some influence over how people vote, with 29% saying it has 'a great deal' of influence, and 45% that it has 'a fair amount'. Only 3% think that the media has no influence at all on the public's electoral decisions.

Men are significantly more likely than women to believe that the media influences how people vote (81% versus 69%), as are people from the higher social grades (88% of ABs compared to 72% of C2DEs). Conservative Party supporters are also more likely to think that the media influences how people vote than are voters who claim to support the other political parties (89% versus 79%); a difference in perspective that is present even when controlling for social grade.

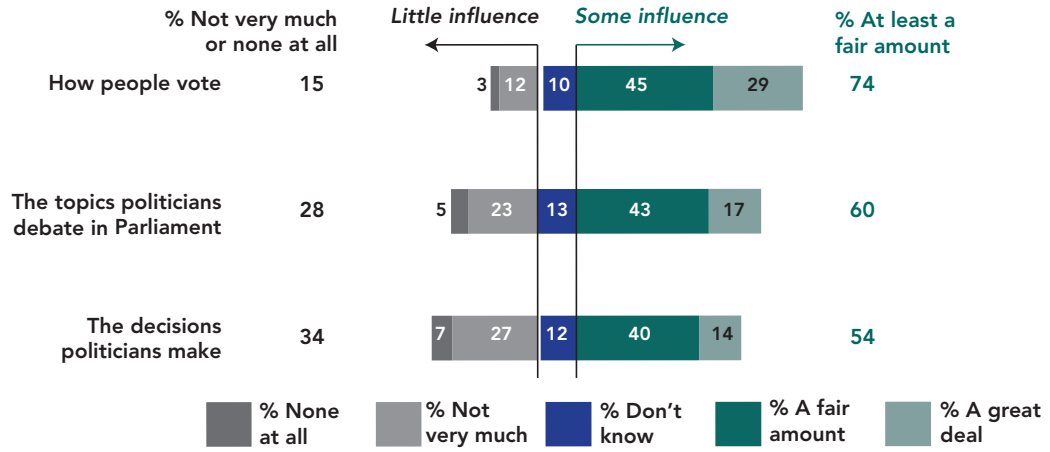
Fewer people feel that the media influences politicians, although still over half feel that they are so influenced. Interestingly, the public are more likely to believe that the media

[5] Hansard Society (2011), *Audit of Political Engagement 8: The 2011 Report* (London: Hansard Society), pp.89-90.

influences what topics politicians debate in Parliament (60%), than what decisions they make in general (54%). Just over a quarter of all respondents (28%) claim that the media has little or no influence on what politicians debate, and just over a third (34%) that it has no influence on the decisions they make.

Figure 8: The influence of the media

Q In your opinion, how much influence does the media have on...



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

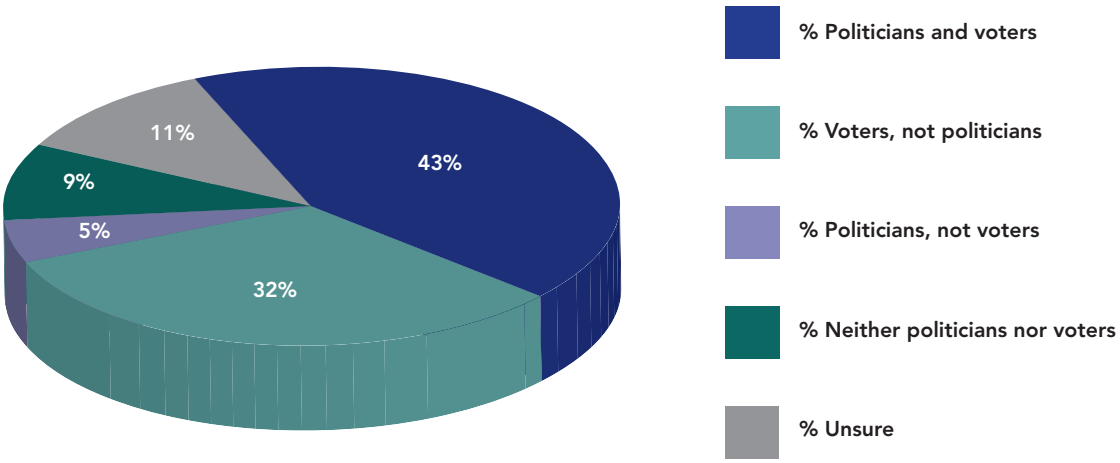
Those in social classes AB are noticeably more likely than average to see the media as influencing the topics politicians debate in Parliament (74%) and a bit more likely than average to think that the media influences the decisions that politicians make (63%). In contrast, those in social classes DE are somewhat less likely to see the media as influential in these respects, reporting roughly 10 percentage point lower than average scores for both measures (49% and 45% respectively). People from lower social grades are more likely to believe that the media do not influence what politicians debate in Parliament (34% of DEs versus 24% of ABs, C1s and C2s) but this difference is not so apparent when looking at the perceived influence of the media on the decisions that politicians make generally.

Men are more likely than women to think that the media influences the topics that politicians debate in Parliament (64% versus 55%) and that it influences the decisions politicians make (61% versus 47%). And Conservative voters are also more likely to say that the media influences the decisions politicians make than are people who voted Labour or Liberal Democrat (67% versus 57%).

Those who read broadsheet newspapers are much more likely to consider the media to be influential than other members of the public. Ninety-three percent believe that the media influences how people vote, 77% that it influences the topics politicians debate in Parliament, and 69% that it influences the decisions that politicians make. Mid-market newspaper consumers are also more likely than average to think that the media influences

how people vote (81%) but are no more likely than average to think that the media is influential with regard to how politicians choose what to debate or in the decisions that they make. Red-top readers and those who claim to read no newspaper at all have roughly average scores for all three measures.

Figure 9: Influence of the media on politicians and voters



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

Given the degree to which the public perceive the media as influential, it might have been expected that they would regard the media as particularly influential on politicians. However, as Figure 9 shows, this appears not to be the case: far fewer members of the public think the media influences politicians than influences voters. Fewer than one in 10 people overall feel that the media does not influence either voters or politicians (9%). In contrast to this, more than four times as many people (43%) think that the media influences both politicians and voters.

3. The impact of media consumption on political engagement

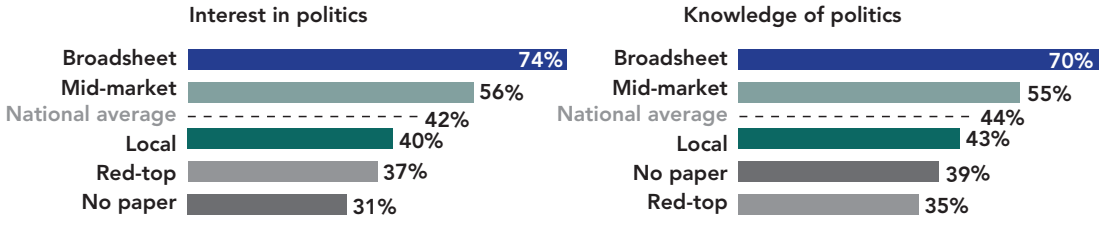
For the last nine years the Audit has explored public attitudes to a range of political engagement indicators that track knowledge of and interest in the political system; the degree of public action and participation in politics; and the public's sense of efficacy and satisfaction with the democratic process. A number of core questions are asked in each poll, enabling us to track responses from year to year and so chart the direction and magnitude of change over the course of the Audit lifecycle.

The results of the core indicators for 2011 were reported in Audit 9: Part One. The trends in respect of interest, knowledge, certainty to vote and satisfaction with the system of government were all down, dramatically so in some instances, suggesting a public that is increasingly disengaged from national politics.

But what difference, if any, does media consumption have on a citizen's propensity to be politically engaged? So dominant is television as a source of political news and information that it is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the degree to which it has an independent impact on political engagement. Indeed, given the high degree of public interest regulation that governs television output as a consequence of its dominance, it is a less compelling case study than that of newspaper readership about whose impact there is much greater debate. After television the print press is the next most important source of the public's political news and information and here, as this chapter explores, there are marked differences in attitude and behaviour between those who read broadsheet, mid-market, and red-top newspapers, local newspapers, or no newspaper at all.

A. Knowledge and interest

Figure 10: Knowledge and interest vs. newspaper readership



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

Interest in politics

The proportion of the public who say they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics plummeted by 16 percentage points in this Audit and now stands at 42%; the first time

interest levels have dropped below 50% in the entire Audit series. In comparison with this national average, broadsheet and mid-market newspaper readers are much more interested in politics (74% and 56% interested respectively) than readers of local papers (40%) or red-tops (37%). They in turn are more interested than those who read no papers at all (31%).

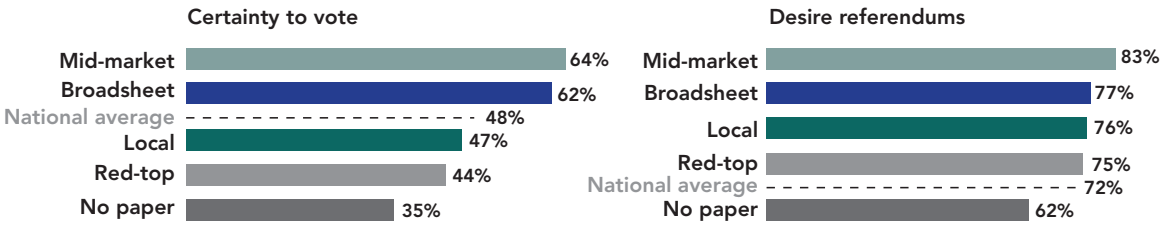
Only 5% of broadsheet readers and 11% of mid-market readers claim to have no interest in politics at all, compared to the national average of 24%. Twenty-six percent of red-top readers say they have no interest, a greater lack of interest than readers of local newspapers (19%), but lower than those who do not read papers at all (37%).

Perceived knowledge of politics

Perceived knowledge of politics also fell in this year's Audit to 44%, a decline of nine percentage points, and more people than ever – 15% – claim to know 'nothing at all' about politics. As with interest, broadsheet readers and mid-market readers are much more likely to feel knowledgeable about politics than the public generally, (70% and 55% respectively). They claim far greater levels of knowledge than readers of no papers at all (39%) who in turn claim more knowledge than red-top readers (35%). In contrast, the claimed knowledge of those who read local papers mirrors the national average (43%). Broadsheet (3%), mid-market (6%) and local newspaper readers (12%) are less likely than the national average (15%) to claim to know 'nothing at all' about politics, and red-top readers (18%) are more likely to do so. But again, those who do not read any newspapers at all (24%) are the most likely to claim no knowledge at all.

B. Action and participation

Figure 11: Voting and desire for referendums vs. newspaper readership



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

Propensity to vote

The number of people who, in the event of an immediate general election, say they would be certain to vote, has dropped by 10 percentage points to 48% and is now three percentage points lower than the previous low recorded in the first ever Audit. Sixteen percent of the public now say they are 'absolutely certain not to vote', a rise of six percentage points in a year and the highest ever recorded level in the Audit series.

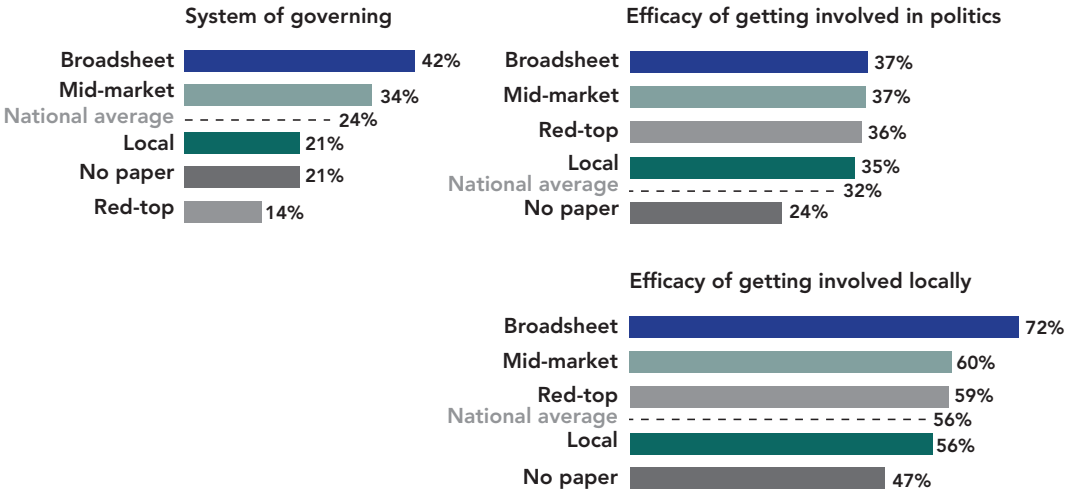
On this measure, again, broadsheet and mid-market readers are more likely than the national average to say that they will vote in the event of a general election (62% and 64%

respectively). Both local paper (47%) and red-top readers (44%) are closer to the national average (48%) whilst those who read no paper at all (35%) are significantly below it. Of non-readers, a full quarter (25%) say they are certain not to vote. Non-voting red-top readers (16%) exactly mirror the national average, while fewer broadsheet (6%) and mid-market (7%) readers say the same.

Interestingly, when it comes to referendums, the pattern of readership support is less predictable. Almost three-quarters of the public (72%) agree that referendums should be used more often to determine important questions. Here, broadsheet (77%), red-top (75%) and local paper readers (76%) hold fairly similar views, close to the national average. In contrast, mid-market readers are more inclined to view referendums favourably (83%). But again, those who read no newspapers display a lower level of engagement on this question; only 62% agree that referendums should be more widely used. Twenty-nine percent of those who read no papers at all claim either not to have a view, or not to know what a referendum is. Seventeen percent of red-top readers say the same, mirroring the national average (17%), while fewer mid-market (7%) and broadsheet readers (3%) claim to be uncertain or lacking in knowledge.

C. Efficacy and satisfaction

Figure 12: Efficacy and satisfaction vs. newspaper readership



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

Present system of governing

For the first time in the Audit series, less than a quarter (24%) of the public think the system of governing works reasonably well, a decline of seven percentage points in a year. Overall satisfaction with the system of governing now stands 12 points lower than it did in the first Audit.

Broadsheet readers are more positive than the general public about the system of governing; 42% think it works at least mainly well. Mid-market readers are also more

positive (34%) than the national average. Those who read local papers or no papers at all are marginally less positive than the average (21% each), but they are much more satisfied with the system of governing than red-top readers, only 14% of whom think the system works reasonably well.

Perceived political efficacy

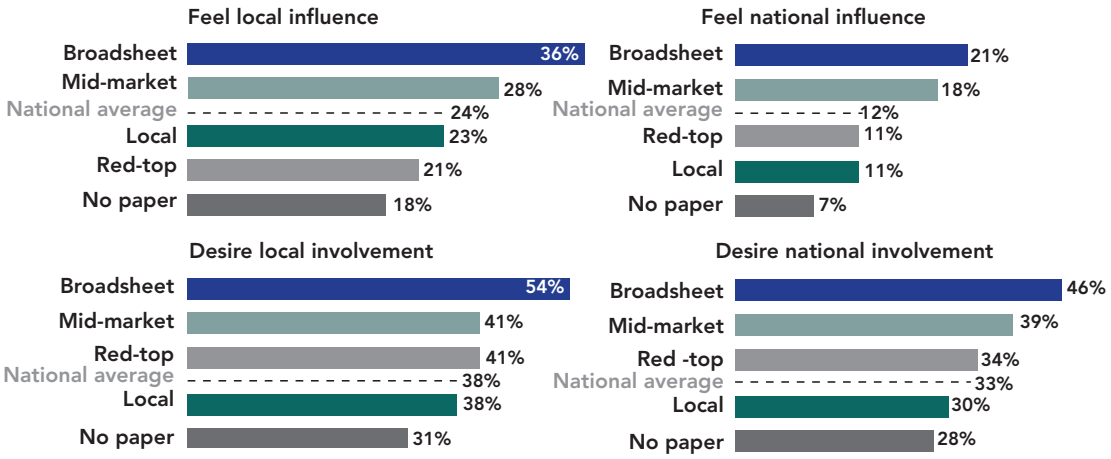
Only 32% of the public agree that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way the UK is run'. Most members of the public simply do not think that if they, or people like themselves, were to get involved in politics they could have any impact on the way the country is run. On this issue there is a clear convergence of attitudes across the population, regardless of levels of interest, knowledge, and satisfaction with the system, and of differences in age, gender and social class. This convergence is mirrored with respect to news consumption: readers of broadsheet (37%), mid-market (37%), red-top (36%) and local newspapers (35%) are all equally as sceptical about their capacity to effect change in the way the country is run. Readers of no paper at all (24%), however, are much less optimistic about the likely efficacy of their involvement in politics.

In contrast, almost three-fifths of the public (56%) agree that 'when people like me get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that their area is run'. The public's sense of the efficacy of local involvement has increased by five percentage points in a year.

Broadsheet readers are much more likely than average to think that by getting involved locally they can make a difference (72% agree). On this question, mid-market (60%), red-top (59%) and local newspaper (56%) readers have similar, roughly average perspectives. But again, readers of no paper at all (47%) are least likely to sense any capacity to make a difference.

D. Civic and political involvement

Figure 13: Civic involvement vs. newspaper readership



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

Influence over local and national decision-making

Unsurprisingly, then, the public's sense of influence over the political process is low and they are twice as likely to feel that they have a perceptible impact on decision-making at the local than at the national level. Twenty-four percent feel they have some influence in the decisions taken in their local area, but only 12% feel the same about decisions concerning the country as a whole. Here again, broadsheet and mid-market readers are more likely to feel influential with regard to national decision-making: 21% and 18% respectively feel they have at least some influence. But red-top (11%) and local newspaper readers (11%) mirror the national average and again readers of no newspaper at all feel the least influential (7%). With regard to influence over local decision-making the picture is a little more diffuse. Broadsheet readers (36%) are more likely than average to feel they have at least some influence with regard to decisions in their local area but mid-market readers feel a lower level of influence (28%). Local newspaper readers (23%) and red-top readers (21%) are close to the national average and, again, readers of no newspaper at all claim to feel the least influence (18%).

Desire for involvement in local and national decision-making

Although an increasing proportion of the population now believe that their participation can make a difference to the way their local area is run (up five percentage points on last year), as yet, there has been no apparent growth in the public's appetite for greater involvement in decision-making at the local level. Only two-fifths (38%) say they are willing to actually become involved in local decision-making, a decline of five percentage points in a year and a decline of 10 percentage points since Audit 6. Similarly, only 33% of the public say they want to be involved in national decision-making.

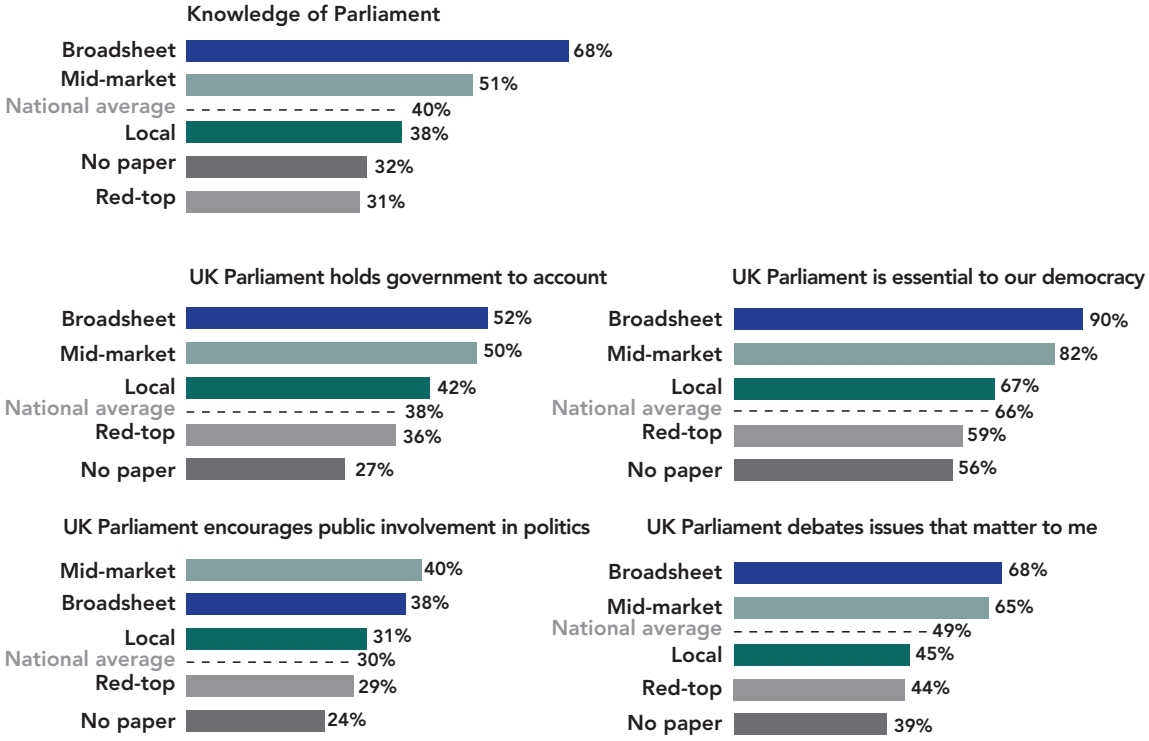
Broadsheet readers are much more likely to want to be involved locally (54%) and nationally (46%) than the average. Mid-market readers (39%) rate a bit above the average in their desire for national involvement, while red-top (34%) and local (30%) paper readers' desire for such involvement is broadly in line with that of the general population. Mid-market (41%), red-top (41%) and local (38%) newspaper readers also broadly mirror the average desire for local involvement. On both measures, however, readers of no papers at all have the lowest level of desire for local (31%) and national involvement (28%).

E. Perceptions of Parliament

Knowledge of Parliament

Forty percent of the public claim at least 'a fair amount' of knowledge about the UK Parliament. On this measure, the difference in claimed knowledge levels between readers of different types of newspaper are particularly stark. Broadsheet (68%) and mid-market (51%) readers are much more likely to say that they feel knowledgeable about Parliament than the general public. Readers of local newspapers (38%) broadly mirror the national average in their claimed knowledge of Parliament. Significantly less knowledgeable about Parliament are those who read no papers at all (32%) and red-top readers (31%). People with internet access are also much more likely to feel knowledgeable about Parliament (42%) than those without (34%).

Figure 14: Perceptions of Parliament vs. newspaper readership



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

The importance and relevance of Parliament

Two-thirds of the public (66%) acknowledge the crucial part that Parliament plays in our democratic system. However, only 49% agree that the issues debated and decided in Parliament have relevance to their own lives; only 38% agree that the government is being held to account by Parliament; and only 30% agree that Parliament encourages public involvement in politics.

Broadsheet (90%) and mid-market readers (82%) are significantly more likely to agree that Parliament is essential to democracy compared to the general population. Readers of local newspapers (67%) mirror the national average, while red-top readers' (59%) perception of Parliament is a little below average as is that of readers of no paper at all (56%). It is important to note, however, that the difference in views here between broadsheet/mid-market readers and red-top/local readers is not because the latter explicitly feel that Parliament is not essential to democracy, but rather that many more of them either have no view or simply say they don't know whether the institution is essential in our democracy.

Broadsheet and mid-market readers are also much more likely to agree than Parliament holds government to account (52% and 50% respectively) compared to the public generally (38%). Local newspaper readers (42%) are marginally more likely than the average to agree and red-top readers (36%) are about average, while readers of no papers at all (27%) are much less likely to agree.

About the same number of mid-market (40%) and broadsheet readers (38%) agree that Parliament encourages public involvement in politics; both ranking well above the national average (30%) on this measure. Local newspaper (31%) and red-top readers (29%) virtually mirror the national population, but readers of no paper at all are less likely to agree (24%).

Broadsheet (68%) and mid-market readers (65%) are also more likely than the average to agree that Parliament debates and makes decisions about 'issues that matter to me'. Local newspaper readers (45%) and red-top readers (44%) fall a little below the national average (49%), while readers of no newspaper at all are, as ever, much less likely to agree (39%).

The role and functions of Parliament

When considering the role and functions of Parliament, the public prioritise, by a significant margin, the representation of 'the UK's national interests' (40%). Representing the views of 'local communities' and 'individual citizens' is prioritised by over a quarter (28%) and a fifth of the public (20%) respectively. Only 23% of the public prioritise 'holding the government to account' and even fewer, 13%, prioritise Parliament's role in 'scrutinising proposed new laws'.

Broadsheet (54%) and mid-market readers (54%) are more likely to prioritise Parliament's role in 'representing the UK's national interests' than the public generally (40%). Readers of local newspapers (39%) and red-tops (37%) are around the national average, while readers of no paper at all (32%) assign less priority to this role.

Red-top (32%) and local newspaper readers (31%) are marginally more likely than mid-market (29%) and broadsheet (26%) readers to consider representing the views of local communities to be important. On this issue readers of no newspapers at all (26%) and broadsheet consumers have a rare meeting of minds.

With regard to the priority attached to Parliament's role in representing the views of individual citizens there is little to choose between readers of different newspapers. All broadly mirror or are slightly above average in the priority they attach to this.

However, the different priority levels attached to Parliament's role in 'scrutinising proposed new laws' are much greater. Here, broadsheet readers (23%) are much more likely and mid-market readers (17%) a little more likely to prioritise this function than the general public (13%). Readers of local newspapers (13%) mirror the national view, but red-top readers (9%) and readers of no newspaper at all (9%) are less inclined to agree that this is a priority for Parliament. In general, however, the lower scores registered here by red-top and local readers, and those who read no paper at all are rooted in much higher levels of 'don't know' responses (17%, 17% and 30% respectively) than were registered by broadsheet or mid-market consumers.

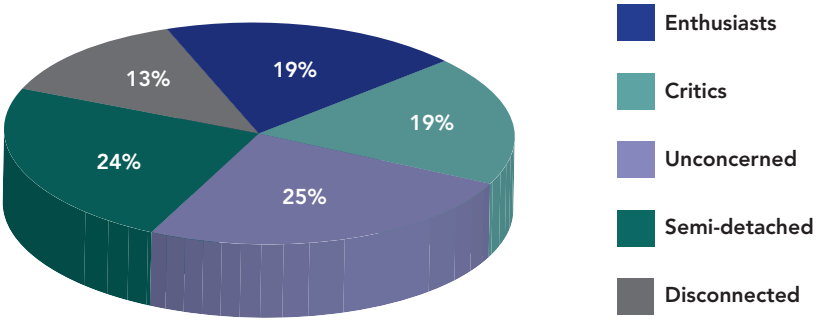
F. Profiles of political media consumption

An alternative way to explore the complex relationship between media consumption and public perceptions of and engagement in politics is to use statistical segmentation techniques to explore underlying attitudes.

By segmenting the public's views on political media with their own patterns of behaviour, five distinct groups emerge in which the members of each group are as like each other, and as different from the members of the other groups as possible, in terms of their attitudes and characteristics.

Group 1: **Enthusiasts (19%)**
Group 2: **Critics (19%)**
Group 3: **Unconcerned (25%)**
Group 4: **Semi-detached (24%)**
Group 5: **Disconnected (13%)**

Figure 15: Profiles of political media consumption



Group 1: Enthusiasts (19% of the GB adult population)

Political media 'enthusiasts' are far more likely to watch current affairs programmes, satirical news programmes, and Prime Minister's Questions than people in any other segment. They are also the most likely to say that they are satisfied with the media's coverage of politics, although this endorsement comes with caveats. Like members of the other segments they believe that the media looks for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians and that they focus on negative stories. However, they also believe that this coverage is a fair representation of politicians and that the media does a good job in keeping the public informed and holding politicians to account. 'Enthusiasts' along with 'critics' are most likely to believe that the media influences how people vote and the topics that are debated in Parliament. However, they differ from the 'critics' in that they are less likely to believe that the media influences the actual decisions that politicians make.

As might be expected, 'enthusiasts' are also the most likely to say that they are interested in politics (72% versus 42% of the rest of the population), and are the most likely to say that

they know at least a fair amount about politics (68% versus 44% of the general public). This group is also the most likely to say that they voted in the last general election. In addition to being more interested in, and more knowledgeable about politics, this group also has a more efficacious view of the political system and has a greater desire to get involved in decision-making. They are the group most likely to agree that that when people like them get involved in politics they can change the way the country is run (41%) and the most likely to say that they would like to be involved in local decision-making (49%).

These 'enthusiasts' also have the highest average age of any of the groups (53 years old) with a high proportion aged 65+. They are also the group with the highest proportion of men (59%) and the second highest proportion of people drawn from social classes AB (20%). As might be expected they are the group that is most likely to read broadsheet newspapers but they are also the most likely to read mid-market newspapers as well.

Group 2: Critics (19% of the GB adult population)

The 'critics' have a relatively high interest in politics but differ from the other groups in that they are dissatisfied with the way that the media cover politics. They mirror the average in terms of the likelihood of their watching satirical political programmes, but they are above average in their propensity to view Prime Minister's Questions and general current affairs shows.

Like the other groups, 'critics' feel that the media tarnish the name of politicians and that they focus on negative stories. However, unlike the other groups, they do not feel that there are also positive aspects to the media's coverage of politics. In particular they feel that the representation of politicians in the media is unfair. They are also less likely to feel that the media hold politicians to account or help the public to learn what is happening in politics. 'Critics' are more likely to believe that the media influences both voters and politicians. While the 'enthusiasts' also believe this to be the case, the 'critics' have the strongest stance: a quarter of them believe that the decisions politicians make are influenced a great deal by the media.

The 'critics' have relatively high levels of perceived knowledge of (53%) and interest in politics (54%) that, although not quite as high as the 'enthusiasts', are still far higher than the other groups. Despite many of their negative views, 'critics' have a high propensity to participate in politics, with seven in 10 (70%) having voted at the last general election. However, perhaps reflecting their more cynical perspective, they have only an average sense of efficacy in relation to their own capacity to make a difference nationally or in their local area, although they do claim a higher than average desire to get involved in local decision-making (43% versus 38%).

The composition of this group is broadly in line with the national profile for age and gender but 'critics' are significantly more likely to be drawn from social classes AB. They are also the most likely group to be living in a rural area. Their newspaper readership profile is also broadly the same as for the population as a whole, although they are slightly more likely to read a broadsheet newspaper.

Group 3: Unconcerned (25% of the GB adult population)

Those who are 'unconcerned' tend to be generally satisfied with the media's coverage of politics but do not pay much attention to it. Only the 'disconnected' are less likely to watch satirical political programmes or Prime Minister's Questions and they are just as likely to watch current affairs programmes as the general population.

Like the 'enthusiasts', their satisfaction with the media's coverage of politics is tempered by the fact that they believe the media look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians, and that they focus on negative stories, but again this is counterbalanced by their belief that the media does a good job in holding politicians to account. They are less likely to believe that the media influences voters or politicians and are the group most likely to think that the media has very little, or no influence at all, on the decisions that politicians make.

The 'unconcerned' have lower levels of perceived knowledge of politics compared to the 'enthusiasts' (41% versus 68%), and less interest in it (40% versus 72%). Nonetheless, they still have a relatively high propensity to vote; just under seven in 10 (69%) said that they voted at the last general election, a significantly higher participation level than the 'semi-detached' and the 'disconnected' and similar to that of the 'critics'.

This group is distinguished in particular by their sense of efficacy and their desire for further involvement in the political process. They have only an average interest in getting involved in decision-making (37% versus 39% of the rest of the population), but they have a higher than average belief that if people like them get involved in politics they can change the way the country is run (37% versus 32%).

There are no significant differences in the composition of the 'unconcerned' and the population as a whole in terms of their age, gender or social class but they are the group most likely to read red-top newspapers.

Group 4: Semi-detached (24% of the GB adult population)

Those who are 'semi-detached' do not regard the media's coverage of politics in a positive light, but they are generally non-committal about it, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied in equal measure.

They are more likely to watch factual programmes about politics than the 'unconcerned' and 'disconnected' and only the 'enthusiasts' are more likely to watch satirical political programmes.

They believe the media looks for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians and that they focus on negative stories but, also that the media performs a positive role in keeping the public informed and holding politicians to account. They are less likely than the 'enthusiasts' and the 'critics' to think that the media influences voters and politicians, but they are significantly more likely to believe this than are the 'unconcerned'. They are also the group most likely to believe that the media are more interested in getting a story than telling the truth.

Their levels of interest in and knowledge of politics are relatively low (34% and 37% respectively) but, unlike the 'unconcerned' this is matched by a lower propensity to vote; only 56% report voting at the last general election (although this is still above average for the population as a whole).

This group also has relatively low levels of political efficacy, particularly with regard to the extent to which they believe they could make a difference to the way the country is run if only they got involved (28% versus 33% nationally). Only the 'disconnected' have a lower level of political efficacy on this measure.

Conversely, however, their lower levels of turnout and sense of efficacy are not matched by their desire to get involved in local decision-making. Here, they have a relatively high level of desire for participation (42% versus 38% nationally).

In terms of its composition, this group is somewhat more female than male (58% versus 42% respectively) but otherwise it is close to the national profile for age and social class. They are, however, significantly more likely to have children under 16 living with them in the household. Their readership of red-top and mid-market newspapers reflects the national average, but only the 'disconnected' are less likely to read broadsheets.

Group 5: Disconnected (13% of the GB adult population)

The 'disconnected' have little interest in politics, consume very little political media and consequently have very few opinions on questions regarding the media's influence on politics. Only around one in 20 in this group watch satirical political programmes (5%), a similar proportion watch general current affairs programmes (6%) and less than 1% say they watch Prime Minister's Questions. When asked for their views on the media's coverage of politics, they generally say 'don't know'. This response also exhibited itself when they were asked about the influence of the media on voters and politicians.

The vast majority of the 'disconnected' group describe themselves as having little or no interest in politics (97%) and only a marginally smaller proportion state that they know little or anything about it (91%). This lack of interest and knowledge manifests itself in their level of participation: only 24% said they had voted at the last general election, the lowest electoral turnout level of all the groups. The 'disconnected' also have the lowest level of political efficacy (11% compared to the national average of 31%) and the least desire to get involved in local decision-making (9% versus 42% national average).

The age profile of this group broadly mirrors that of the population as a whole, although they are not the youngest group. They are, however, significantly more likely to be women (62%) and significantly more likely to belong to social classes DE than members of the other groups. The 'disconnected' are also significantly more likely to be drawn from the BME community than the other groups and more likely to live in urban areas. Nearly half of them do not read a newspaper (49%), nearly double the rate of non-readership for any of the other groups. Those that do read newspapers tend to read red-tops; readership of the mid-market and broadsheet newspapers is very low.

4. The media and political engagement: a democratic responsibility?

We know from previous Audits, and from the analysis set out in the preceding chapters, that the media is crucial in providing access to news and information about politics, and that television provides the lens through which the public's view of politics is largely framed. We know that the public also perceives the media to be highly significant in shaping both the content and the conduct of politics, thereby influencing citizens' political preferences and attitudes towards politics. Moreover, the public seems to believe that the media is more likely to influence them as voters than it is to influence politicians in relation to decision-making.

Newspaper readership and the relationship with political engagement

As far as newspaper readership is concerned, the results confirm that it is clearly better to read some form of newspaper than none at all: people who read no newspapers at all have much less strong views, both positively and negatively inclined, and by far the lowest levels of political engagement. They are less likely to be interested in and knowledgeable about politics, and much less certain to vote.

There is also little evidence that red-top newspapers stimulate the political engagement of their readers. Red-top only readers are significantly more disengaged from politics than readers of other newspapers: they are less interested in and feel less knowledgeable about politics, are less certain to vote, are less satisfied with the system of governing than the average, and are considerably less satisfied than broadsheet or mid-market readers.

At the other end of the spectrum, broadsheet readers, even taking into account demographic differences, are more likely to be politically engaged and feel they can exercise influence in the political process. There does appear to be a relationship between broadsheet reading and political engagement.

In the middle of the readership spectrum, the impact of mid-market newspapers on political engagement appears more variable, although on all measures they score more highly than the national average. Mid-market readers are marginally more likely to vote than broadsheet readers, but claim to be less interested in and less knowledgeable about politics, feel less influential, and are less satisfied with our system of government. On all measures of engagement mid-market readers always score above red-top readers but where they fall in the range between red-top and broadsheet readers varies from measure to measure; sometimes they are closer to the profile of broadsheet readers, sometimes to that of red-top readers.

Although fewer in number in terms of actual newspaper titles, the mid-market sector is significant in terms of sales and the degree to which it is perceived, particularly by politicians

and other media, to help frame political debate in this country as the self-proclaimed voice of the 'silent majority'. Much more research is therefore needed to assess the impact of mid-market newspapers on political engagement, particularly to isolate and measure the specific nature and scale of that impact, independent of other factors such as social class. This is work that the Hansard Society intends to revisit in the future.

Readers of local newspapers are generally closer to the average on all the measures of political engagement, below broadsheet readers but often slightly above readers of red-tops, and on some measures close to mid-market consumers. However, local newspapers are hardly a homogenous group and many consumers of local newspapers will likely read national newspaper titles as well. The effects of local newspapers in relation to political engagement are thus more complex. Again, therefore, more research is needed to isolate and measure the specific nature and scale of this impact, independent of other factors, and perhaps to map it regionally to assess whether there are geographical differences given the degree to which the local newspaper sector has been decimated in recent years.

The differential impact of broadsheet and tabloid readership on political engagement

Looking at newspaper readership through the prism of broadsheet versus tabloid there is little evidence that the latter advance the political citizenship of their readers, relative even to those who read no newspaper at all. Such is the unremitting diet of negativity that tabloid readers are, for example, less likely than even non-newspaper readers to think that our system of governing works well.

Figure 16 compares the differential impact of broadsheet and tabloid readership on the public's relationship to politics as found through nine of the Audit's key indicators of political engagement when compared to those of non-newspaper readers.[6]

The message it conveys is a stark one. Although tabloid readers are more likely than non-readers to engage with politics, the effect is depressingly small, especially when you take into account that non-readers are by far the least politically engaged group in society. More alarmingly still, tabloid readers are no more positive than non-readers about their capacity to influence decision-making, and are actually less likely than non-readers to believe that the system of governing is working at least reasonably well.

In contrast, reading broadsheet media makes citizens much more likely than both tabloid readers and non-readers alike to engage with and participate in politics, and to be more positive about the governing system and their own capacity to influence it. Even when controlling for the influence of social class, the effects are still evident. It is difficult to infer direct causality here; those most engaged in politics may simply be more inclined to broadsheet readership. However, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the relationship between newspaper readership and political engagement is perhaps better seen as a mutually reinforcing one.

What is clear is that there is little, if any, evidence that tabloid newspapers help to advance the political engagement of their readers. Indeed, beyond this, there is reason to believe

[6] See Appendix D for the relevant multivariate logistic regression analysis tables based on the Audit data.

that coverage of politics by the tabloid media may actually be contributing to a sense of fatalism among their readership about the political process itself: the way politics operates and the capacity of politicians to take the decisions necessary to run the country.

Figure 16: Broadsheet and tabloid readers' relationship to politics

Political Engagement Indicator	Broadsheet-only readers (compared to readers of no newspaper at all)	Tabloid-only readers (compared to readers of no newspaper at all)
Interest in politics	6.5 times more likely to express interest	1.5 times more likely to express interest
Knowledge of politics	7.3 times more likely to claim knowledge	1.4 times more likely to claim knowledge
Certainty to vote	3.5 times more likely to be certain to vote	1.4 times more likely to be certain to vote
Voted in last general election	2.5 times more likely to have voted	1.5 times more likely to have voted
System of governing works at least reasonably well	Roughly twice as likely to consider the political system to be working well	Marginally less likely to consider the political system to be working well
Efficacy of involvement in national politics	Twice as likely to think that if people like themselves get involved in politics they can really change the way the country is run	1.5 times more likely to think that if people like themselves get involved in politics they can really change the way the country is run
Efficacy of involvement in local area	Twice as likely to think that if people like themselves get involved in their local community they can really change the way that their area is run	1.2 times more likely to think that if people like themselves get involved in their local community they can really change the way that their area is run
Influence over national decision-making	Twice as likely to feel able to influence national decision-making	No more likely to feel able to influence national decision-making
Influence over local decision-making	2.5 times more likely to feel able to influence local decision-making	No more likely to feel able to influence local decision-making

Tabloid readers: a 'stealth' view of democracy

Alongside the Audit of Political Engagement survey we asked a separate set of questions to the same sample, to test attitudes towards the concept of a 'stealth' view of democracy.[7]

[7] See J. Hibbing and E. Theiss-Morse (2002), *Stealth democracy: American's beliefs about how government should work* (New York: Cambridge University Press); M. Neblo, K. Esterling, R. Kennedy, D. Lazer & A. Sohkey (2009), 'Who wants to deliberate and why?', Harvard Kennedy School, Faculty Research Working Paper, RWP09-027, September 2009; and G. Stoker and C. Hay, 'Comparing folk theories of democratic politics: stealth and sunshine', PSA (UK) Annual Conference Paper 2012, for a fuller explanation and analysis of this concept.

This is a concept first advanced by a team of American academics to explain some people's perceptions of politics as a largely unpleasant feature of modern life: time-consuming and prone to corruption. Those holding such views typically see political debate as pointless (since sensible people already agree on what should be done). Moreover, since on most issues citizens hold no strong views, they are content to turn over decision-making authority to someone else. These citizens do not want to hold decision-makers to account for the details of their decisions. Rather they seek a general reassurance that decisions are being made in the public interest and without undue interference or influence from partisan or sectional interests. Those with a 'stealth' democracy profile believe what is required from government is effective action rather than more talk about the issues, with decisions taken on the basis of informed or expert input rather than through a political process involving debate, mediation of interests and, if necessary, compromise.

To test the degree to which the Audit sample of the public adhere to this framework we asked respondents about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following 'stealth' statements:

- Elected politicians would help the country more if they would stop talking and just take action on important problems.
- What people call 'compromise' in politics, is really just selling out one's principles.
- Our government would run better if decisions were left up to successful business people.
- Our government would run better if decisions were left up to non-elected, independent experts rather than politicians or the people.

These statements clearly accord with a negative and cynical view of politics; agreement with them would suggest little or no faith in politics and politicians, and that the running of the country would be improved if politics could be taken out of the equation.

Assessing the results whilst controlling for the influence of demographic and media consumption factors shows that tabloid-only readers have a statistically significant difference in their outlook: they are twice as likely to agree with this 'stealth' view of politics than readers of no paper at all.[8] Broadsheet-only readers are less likely to sympathise with these 'stealth' attitudes to politics than readers of no newspaper at all, who in turn are less likely to agree with the 'stealth' view than tabloid-only readers. Thus, although readers of no newspaper at all are less politically engaged than tabloid readers by almost all of the standard Audit measures, it is tabloid readers who nonetheless have a more cynical and negative attitude to politics overall.

Strikingly, none of the other demographic factors known to influence political engagement are statistically significant in relation to this 'stealth' model of democracy. Gender, age and, most importantly, social class have no statistically meaningful bearing on a person's likely agreement with this negative, cynical perspective on politics; being a tabloid-only reader is the determining factor. These results suggest that tabloid-only readers not only have low

[8] See the regression table for Q23 in Appendix D.

levels of political engagement but they are consuming media that reinforces their negative evaluation of politics, thereby contributing to a fatalistic and cynical attitude to democracy and their own role in it.

Moreover, we also know that even tabloid readers themselves perceive that the treatment of politics by their own newspapers of choice is poor: that their papers are more interested in getting a story than telling the truth and that they focus on negative stories about politicians whose name they look to tarnish. Indeed, a quarter of tabloid readers could be categorised as being tabloid media critics.

Does the media have a democratic responsibility?

This research raises important questions about what, exactly, the media, and particularly the tabloids, are therefore accomplishing in relation to politics and by extension what responsibilities, if any, they have in our democracy.

'…..because all we've talked about is you know…the scandals and expenses, that – that's what you, that, that's what newspapers and tabloids grab onto… it's a really powerful tool but it's used in the wrong way. I think it's used to, you know, it's used to sell papers. It's used to sell information rather than the, the information you want to know about or you should be hearing about…..You know you, you don't really know too much about the important side of things.'

Female participant, Edinburgh, March 2012

On the one hand, the results indicate that the public is generally satisfied with much of the media coverage of politics, although those who are dissatisfied are broadly concerned about coverage that fails to present the full facts and provide a balanced treatment of the issues. Television fares better than any other form of media, reflecting perhaps the extent to which public interest regulation addresses these challenges. However, this should not be overstated. The public do not give television a ringing endorsement: only four to five in every 10 people agree that it is fair in its representation of politics and helps the public learn about what is happening in politics. Similarly, although broadsheet readers are more likely to be politically engaged, fewer than four in 10 members of the public believe that they do a good job of holding politicians accountable, helping the public to learn about what is happening in politics, and are fair in their representation of politics. As for the tabloids, large proportions of the public agree – including tabloid readers themselves – that they are not seekers after truth, and that they are failing to provide the information that citizens require to participate in the political process.

Overall, these results would therefore suggest that the media – particularly the print press and specifically tabloids – do not greatly benefit our democracy from the perspective of nourishing political engagement. The link between a vibrant and effective media and the dynamism of our democracy is compromised. Indeed, in this respect, the press, particularly the tabloids, appear not to be living up to the importance of their role in our democracy. Yes, they certainly entertain and it is this that surely helps explain the sales of the red-top and mid-market titles. Understandably, looking for their own unique selling point, many of

them are also effective promoters of campaigns: for example, the 'Help for Heroes' campaign to support military veterans, or the Sarah's Law campaign to name and shame paedophiles. Whilst this is perceived as a form of public service by the media, nonetheless, at times, some of these campaigns could be said to actively undermine the democratic process for, unlike politicians, they have no need to mediate between different, often competing interests and demands, and they rarely grapple with nuance or complexity.

In the opinion of most members of the public, the press are simply not effective at conveying information and knowledge to their readers, nor at performing their crucial watchdog role of holding politicians and government to account. Indeed, it is not always clear exactly how some sections of the press perceive their watchdog role: denigrating politicians and undermining the political system and citizens' faith in it, is not the same as holding the political class accountable.

In our focus groups held across Great Britain, all participants were invited at the end to suggest what three things about the political process – the way politics is practised – they would most like to see reformed. Thirteen percent of all the ideas that emerged could be classified as calling for the creation of a more positive environment in which politics, through information, context, and discourse could flourish. What the participants seemed to want was the politics of conversation rather than combat.

Yet the press, particularly the tabloids, appear to have too narrow a perspective on their role and responsibilities in relation to our democracy. The fourth estate's right to free expression must be zealously guarded and in a competitive marketplace there is nothing wrong with attaching high priority to a desire to entertain. But, consistent with the complexity and differentiated character of the public's views, the media should also bear some responsibility, commensurate with the extent of its influence, for the consequences of its coverage on the content and character of the democratic process and the willingness of citizens to engage in it.

The public's sense of the media's portrayal of politics and its role and influence upon our democratic political culture is both mixed and highly differentiated. The response to the question of media regulation should therefore be similarly nuanced. The part of the media that attracts greatest public support – the broadcast media – is already subject to public interest requirements. However, the tabloid media, and newspapers more generally, are where the public thinks the balance of contribution to our democracy errs towards the negative. Given the influence that the public thinks the media has, and the demonstrable link between readership and political engagement, it seems appropriate to strive to balance that power and influence with some form of independent, public interest regulatory framework – supported by a more effective sanctions regime – which recognises and is designed to stimulate the responsibilities of the press alongside its rights within our democracy. Such a framework must enable the press to develop informative, rich and entertaining content, but should also require of them that they give greater thought to purveying context and therefore balance in their coverage of politics. It should also strive to encourage the press to think more deeply about the responsibilities of their 'watchdog' role, how they hold political actors to account, how they explain the political process, and how they can foster and support a more politically engaged citizenry.

Appendix A: Quantitative survey methodology

TNS-BMRB conducted face-to-face interviews with a representative quota sample of 1,163 adults aged 18 or above living in Great Britain. The interviews took place between 7 and 13 December 2011 and were carried out in respondents' homes. The interview total includes 239 booster interviews, which were undertaken in order to make comparisons between different regions and between the white and BME populations more statistically reliable. 95 booster interviews were conducted with respondents living in Scotland, 53 with respondents living in Wales, and 91 with respondents from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) cultural backgrounds. This gives a total of 181 interviews in Scotland, 98 in Wales, and 195 with people from BME backgrounds.

The survey was repeated between 11 and 15 January 2012: 1,235 face-to-face interviews were carried out including 169 respondents in Scotland, 105 in Wales, and 213 from BME backgrounds. For the purposes of the multivariate regression analysis the two survey datasets were combined, and chapter four reports on that combined dataset.

The datasets have been weighted to the national population profile of Great Britain.

Statistical reliability

The respondents selected to take part in the survey constitute a sample of the total adult population of Great Britain. Quotas were used to ensure that the number of men and women interviewed, and the number of respondents who worked full-time, part-time or not at all, were representative of the overall population. Nevertheless, as it stands the sample does not reflect an accurate picture of the demographic profile of Great Britain. This is partly because some categories of respondents – such as young people and full-time workers – are less likely to be at home when interviewers knock on their door or are more reluctant to take part in surveys. Extra interviews were required amongst people living in Wales and Scotland, and amongst people from BME backgrounds, to ensure that the number of respondents in each of these groups was sufficient to perform robust analysis. As a result, the proportion of people belonging to these groups is greater in the sample than in the population.

In order to compensate for these biases, the proportion of respondents in each gender, age band and working status was compared to the true proportions in the population. Any differences were corrected by assigning less weight to the responses given by people who were over-represented in the sample. Hence, the additional interviews conducted in Wales, Scotland and with BMEs were 'down-weighted' to match the distribution of these groups in Great Britain. One consequence of this corrective procedure is that it reduces the size of the sample on which the results are based (the so-called 'effective sample size'). Thus, even

though 1,163 adults were interviewed in December 2011, the effective size of the sample is 1,043.[9]

Despite these corrective measures, we cannot be certain whether the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody in Great Britain had been interviewed. Conventionally, survey findings are considered reliable if we are confident that repeating the survey on multiple occasions would lead to similar results 95% of the time.[10] Effective sample sizes are key to determining whether any differences we obtain by running the survey on multiple occasions, or differences in the findings for different groups of respondents, are due to chance alone or whether one set of results genuinely deviates from another set of results. To determine whether a difference constitutes a 'true' deviation, and to feel 95% confident that the interpretation of 'true difference' is valid, the difference must exceed a certain threshold, as shown below:

Approximately what proportion gave a specific response?						
What is the effective size of the samples being compared?		If 10% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 30% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 50% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 70% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 90% of respondents gave a specific response...
Sample A	Sample B	**the difference in the two samples must be around†:**				
100	100 or more	10%	14%	14%	14%	10%
200	200 or more	7%	10%	10%	10%	7%
300	300 or more	6%	8%	8%	8%	6%
400	400 or more	5%	7%	7%	7%	5%
500	500 or more	5%	6%	7%	6%	5%
600	600 or more	4%	6%	6%	6%	4%
700	700 or more	4%	5%	6%	5%	4%
800	800 or more	4%	5%	5%	5%	4%
1,000	1,000 or more	3%	5%	5%	5%	3%
1,200	1,200 or more	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%
1,500	1,500 or more	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%
		...before it can be considered 'statistically significant'				

†These figures are conservative and therefore indicative only. Sometimes a smaller difference may be statistically significant, especially if SAMPLE B is much larger than SAMPLE A.

The table above is useful when comparing findings between, for example, Audit 9 (effective size 1,043) and Audit 8 (effective size 788). If approximately 50% of respondents in Audit 8 gave a specific response, a difference of around five percentage points (or more) in Audit 9 would indicate a true change had occurred between surveys; a smaller difference would not be considered 'statistically significant' and would conventionally be put down to chance. Similarly, effective sample sizes are important for determining whether differences between the responses given by various sub-groups within the Audit 9 sample are statistically reliable:

[9] The effective size of the January 2012 sample is 1,122 (unweighted sample size is 1,235).

[10] The 95% confidence level indicates that, if the survey were repeated 20 times, results would be similar on 19 occasions. Any minor variations between the results on those 19 occasions can be attributed to chance, and are not considered to be statistically significant.

		If 10% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 30% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 50% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 70% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 90% of respondents gave a specific response...
SAMPLE A	SAMPLE B	**the difference in the two samples must be around:**				
Audit 8 (788)	Audit 9 (1,043)	3%	5%	5%	5%	3%
Men (499)	Women (544)	5%	6%	7%	6%	5%
BME (190)	White (892)	5%	8%	8%	8%	5%
		...before it can be considered 'statistically significant'				

Guide to social grade definitions

The social grade definitions used by the TNS Omnibus are those introduced by the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research.[11] For practical purposes, the classification divides individuals into four categories:

Social grade	Label		Definition
AB	Managers and professionals	A	Well-educated top to middle level managers with responsibility for extensive personnel; well-educated independent or self-employed professional people
		B	Well-educated smaller middle-level managers or slightly less well-educated top managers with fewer personnel responsibilities
C1	Well-educated non-manual and skilled workers	C1	Clerical employees (junior managerial, junior administrative, junior professional), supervisors and small business owners
C2	Skilled workers and non-manual employees	C2	Supervisors or skilled manual workers, generally having served an apprenticeship; moderately well-educated non-manual employees
DE	Unskilled manual workers and other less well-educated workers or employees	D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers; poorly-educated managers or small business owners
		E	Poorly-educated manual workers, unskilled workers, and employees working in other non-clerical settings; all others subsisting with minimum levels of income

[11] European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (1997), 'A System of International Socio-economic Classification of Respondents to Survey Research' (Amsterdam: ESOMAR).

Appendix B: Audit of Political Engagement (APE) Poll topline findings

Figures used in the report

The Audit 9 figures used in this report are primarily derived from the face-to-face survey conducted in respondents' homes between 7 and 13 December 2011. The topline findings presented in this appendix should be read alongside the findings from the rest of the survey, as set out in Appendix B of the Audit of Political Engagement 9: Part One report.

Where applicable, trend data from previous Audits of Political Engagement are shown in the topline figures. Information about this data is summarised in the table below. Fuller information about the past surveys can be found in the Part One report.

Audit of Political Engagement (APE)	Sample size	Sample definition	Fieldwork dates	Notes
APE9	1,163	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	7–13 December 2011	Reported data in chapter four is derived from this dataset combined with field-work with 1,235 adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain, conducted 11–15 January 2012.
APE8	1,197	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	3–9 December 2010	Reported data for Scotland includes an additional 98 interviews conducted 7–13 January 2011, providing a total of 197 adults in Scotland.
APE7	1,156	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	13–19 November 2009	

Notes on tables:

- Data are weighted to the profile of the population.
- An asterisk (*) indicates a finding of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.
- A dash (-) indicates that no respondents chose a response.
- Greyed-out columns indicate that a question was not asked in that year's Audit.
- Where percentages do not add up to exactly 100% this may be due to computer rounding, or because multiple answers were permitted for a question.
- Data in this report has been analysed to one decimal place and rounded accordingly.

Q16.	Which of these are your main sources of political news and information? You can select up to three options.
	%
Television	75
Tabloid newspapers	27
Radio	26
News websites	20
Broadsheet newspapers	16
Friends and/or family	10
Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)	6
Leaflets and magazines produced by political parties	4
Leaflets and magazines produced by charities or pressure groups	2
Political blogs	1
Teachers and lecturers	1
Political party websites	1
Charity and pressure group websites	1
Something else	1
Not applicable, I don't follow political news	8
Don't know	3

Q17.	And do you watch any of the following (when they're on)?
	%
Have I Got News for You	42
Question Time	41
Mock the Week	30
Election coverage	22
Prime Minister's Questions	20
Party political broadcast	15
Leaders' debates	9
Daily Politics	9
This Week	5
None of these	27
Don't know	*

Base: All GB adults aged 18 or above whose main sources of political news and information include the television (862)

Q18.	How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the media reports politics in the UK?								
	APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
Very satisfied							4		5
Fairly satisfied							34		40
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied							21		31
Fairly dissatisfied							24		13
Very dissatisfied							14		6
Don't know							3		5
Very/fairly satisfied							38		45

Q19.	Is your dissatisfaction with the way the media reports politics related to any of the following? Would you say reports often...
	%
Don't present the full facts	47
Make little or no attempt to present a story in a balanced way	39
Try to make people unnecessarily scared or angry	27
Don't explain the matter they're discussing in a clear way	19
Make little or no effort to report positive political news	14
Are presented in a condescending way	10
Contain nothing of interest to me, my family or my work	10
Use technical language and terms people find hard to understand	8
Make little or no attempt to explain why this should matter to me	7
Make light of serious matters	6
None of these	6
Don't know	5

Base: All adults aged 18 or above who are dissatisfied with media reporting of politics (220)

Q20.	Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statement applies to.					
	They look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians	They do a good job of keeping politicians accountable for their conduct	They focus on negative stories about politics and politicians	They are generally fair in their representation of politicians	They are more interested in getting a story than telling the truth	They help the public to learn about what is happening in politics
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Broadsheet newspapers	20	34	21	27	23	37
Tabloid newspapers	63	29	62	15	68	25
Television news programmes	21	38	28	41	26	55
Radio news programmes	12	18	14	20	14	26
None	12	19	11	21	8	12
Don't know	15	15	13	16	12	12

Q21.	In your opinion, how much influence does the media have on...?		
	How people vote	The topics politicians debate in Parliament	The decisions politicians make
	%	%	%
A great deal	29	17	14
A fair amount	45	43	40
Not very much	12	23	27
None at all	3	5	7
Don't know	10	13	12
Great deal/ fair amount	*74*	*60*	*54*

Appendix C: Media segment profiles

Demographic profiles						
	Total	Enthusiasts	Critics	Unconcerned	Semi-detached	Disconnected
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Gender						
Men	48	59	53	46	42	38
Women	52	41	47	54	58	62
Age						
18-24	14	7	13	17	16	17
25-34	19	15	14	21	20	26
35-44	16	13	15	19	21	10
45-54	14	15	15	12	14	11
55-64	14	18	18	11	12	11
65-74	11	16	12	9	8	10
75+	12	16	13	11	10	15
Social Grade						
AB	15	20	22	14	13	5
C1	25	27	21	28	26	19
C2	18	19	16	19	21	14
DE	42	34	41	38	40	62
Ethnicity						
White	90	90	93	89	92	85
BME	10	10	7	11	8	15
Working status						
In work	46	45	45	50	48	34
Not in work	54	55	55	50	52	66
Children in household						
Yes	32	23	26	34	39	36
No	68	77	74	66	61	64
Unweighted	1163	217	224	300	158	264

Media consumption profiles						
	Total	**Enthusiasts**	**Critics**	**Unconcerned**	**Semi-detached**	**Disconnected**
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Newspaper readership						
Broadsheet	21	34	26	23	17	2
Mid-market	24	34	25	23	24	9
Red-top	35	32	31	42	37	29
Main source political news/information						
Television	77	100	78	69	81	47
Tabloids	28	31	27	32	30	9
Broadsheets	16	28	16	17	13	3
Radio	27	37	31	25	28	8
Don't follow political news	8	0	5	3	5	45
Programme viewing						
Satirical shows	38	34	41	41	37	32
Political and current affairs programmes	42	99	52	15	37	9
Prime Minister's Questions	15	48	19	1	10	1
Unweighted	1163	217	224	300	158	264

Political engagement profiles						
	Total	Enthusiasts	Critics	Unconcerned	Semi-detached	Disconnected
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Knowledge of politics						
A great deal/ a fair amount	43	68	54	41	37	8
Not very much/ nothing at all	56	32	46	59	62	87
Knowledge of Parliament						
A great deal/ a fair amount	40	61	48	39	34	10
Not very much/ nothing at all	59	39	52	60	66	85
Opinion of system of governing						
Works extremely/ mainly well	24	61	22	39	21	6
Needs a lot/ great deal of improvement	67	38	72	60	72	52
Political efficacy: involvement can change way country is run						
Agree	32	41	35	37	28	11
Disagree	36	36	36	34	39	31
Propensity to vote						
Certain to vote	48	71	57	45	38	22
Certain not to vote	16	4	13	14	21	33
Whether voted in May 2010						
Yes	63	83	70	68	56	24
No	32	16	26	29	41	56

Political engagement profiles						
	Total	**Enthusiasts**	**Critics**	**Unconcerned**	**Semi-detached**	**Disconnected**
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Party voted for in May 2010						
Conservatives	19	24	25	21	16	3
Labour	24	29	26	26	24	13
Liberal Democrats	9	14	8	12	8	2
Voting intention						
Conservatives	18	23	19	22	16	3
Labour	31	32	34	32	32	22
Liberal Democrats	6	9	4	7	6	2
Unweighted	1163	217	224	300	158	264

Appendix D: Multivariate logistic regression tables

The tables for the multivariate logistic regression analysis presented in this appendix should be read alongside the survey data from Appendix B in this report and the Audit of Political Engagement 9: Part One. The numbering of questions below is not sequential. It refers to the ordering of the questions used in the full Audit survey, and those highlighted below concern only those questions that are relevant to analysis of the media and political engagement.

SE = Standard Error
CI = Confidence Interval
P = P-value (statistical significance)

Q1.	**How likely would you be to vote in an immediate general election, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you would be absolutely certain to vote, and 1 means that you would be absolutely certain not to vote?**

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining '10, 9, 8, 7' responses) or No ('1-6'), excluding refused responses and 'don't know' cases. n=2,310

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.19* (0.09)	0.83 (0.69-1.00)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.44** (0.11)	1.55 (1.25-1.93)
	55+	1.41** (0.12)	4.08 (3.23-5.15)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.27 (0.15)	0.76 (0.57-1.02)
	D or E	-0.46** (0.15)	0.63 (0.47-0.84)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	1.24** (0.18)	3.46 (2.45-4.88)
	Tabloid readers only	0.30* (0.11)	1.35 (1.08-1.69)
	Both	1.12** (0.20)	3.07 (2.08-4.54)
	Local or other newspaper	0.13 (0.15)	1.14 (0.84-1.53)
	Constant	0.06 (0.18)	1.06

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q4.	How interested would you say you are in politics?

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining 'very interested' and 'fairly interested' responses) or No ('not very interested' and 'not at all interested'), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,389

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.45** (0.10)	0.63 (0.52-0.78)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.36* (0.12)	1.44 (1.13-1.83)
	55+	0.69** (0.12)	2.00 (1.57-2.56)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.38* (0.18)	0.68 (0.48-0.97)
	D or E	-0.83** (0.18)	0.44 (0.31-0.62)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	1.86** (0.25)	6.45 (3.97-10.47)
	Tabloid readers only	0.39** (0.12)	1.47 (1.17-1.85)
	Both	1.90** (0.29)	6.70 (3.76-11.95)
	Local or other newspaper	0.41* (0.16)	1.51 (1.11-2.07)
	Constant	1.11** (0.20)	3.04

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q5a.	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about…politics?

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining 'a great deal' and 'a fair amount' responses) or No ('not very much' and 'nothing at all'), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,386

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.47** (0.13)	0.62 (0.49-0.80)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.45** (0.15)	1.57 (1.18-2.09)
	55+	0.98** (0.16)	2.67 (1.97-3.62)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.54* (0.26)	0.58 (0.35-0.96)
	D or E	-1.19** (0.25)	0.31 (0.19-0.50)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	1.99** (0.36)	7.33 (3.62-14.81)
	Tabloid readers only	0.34* (0.14)	1.40 (1.07-1.85)
	Both	1.68** (0.36)	5.35 (2.64-10.87)
	Local or other newspaper	0.52* (0.20)	1.68 (1.14-2.48)
	Constant	1.97** (0.27)	7.17

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q8.	**Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain?**

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining 'works extremely well and could not be improved' and 'could be improved in small ways but mainly works well' responses) or No ('could be improved quite a lot' and 'needs a great deal of improvement'), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,208

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.35** (0.10)	0.70 (0.58-0.85)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	-0.31** (0.12)	0.73 (0.57-0.93)
	55+	-0.07 (0.12)	0.93 (0.74-1.17)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.39** (0.13)	0.68 (0.52-0.87)
	D or E	-0.76** (0.14)	0.47 (0.35-0.62)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.61** (0.16)	1.84 (1.35-2.50)
	Tabloid readers only	-0.09 (0.13)	0.91 (0.70-1.18)
	Both	0.54* (0.18)	1.71 (1.19-2.45)
	Local or other newspaper	0.28 (0.17)	1.32 (0.95-1.84)
	Constant	-0.29 (0.18)	0.75

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q9.	**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run.**

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining 'strongly agree' and 'tend to agree' responses) or No ('tend to disagree' and 'strongly disagree'), excluding 'neither agree nor disagree' and 'don't know' cases. n=1,645

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.09 (0.10)	0.91 (0.75-1.11)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	-0.03 (0.13)	0.97 (0.75-1.26)
	55+	-0.31* (0.12)	0.73 (0.58-0.94)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.08 (0.15)	0.93 (0.70-1.23)
	D or E	0.15 (0.15)	1.16 (0.86-1.56)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.62* (0.17)	1.86 (1.32-2.61)
	Tabloid readers only	0.41* (0.13)	1.51 (1.16-1.96)
	Both	0.91** (0.21)	2.48 (1.65-3.72)
	Local or other newspaper	0.43** (0.18)	1.54 (1.09-2.18)
	Constant	-0.23 (0.19)	0.80

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q13.	**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When people like me get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that their area is run.**

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining 'strongly agree' and 'tend to agree' responses) or No ('tend to disagree' and 'strongly disagree'), excluding 'neither agree nor disagree' and 'don't know' cases. n=1,780

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	0.12 (0.11)	1.12 (0.90-1.41)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	-0.02 (0.15)	0.98 (0.72-1.32)
	55+	-0.45** (0.14)	0.64 (0.48-0.84)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.39* (0.18)	0.68 (0.48-0.97)
	D or E	-0.38* (0.18)	0.68 (0.48-0.98)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.78** (0.21)	2.19 (1.45-3.31)
	Tabloid readers only	0.18 (0.14)	1.20 (0.90-1.58)
	Both	0.99** (0.27)	2.69 (1.58-4.57))
	Local or other newspaper	0.21 (0.19)	1.24 (0.85-1.80)
	Constant	1.39** (0.22)	4.00

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q14a.	**How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in...your local area?**

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining 'a great deal of influence' and 'a fair amount of influence' responses) or No ('not very much influence' and 'no influence all'), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,314

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.02 (0.09)	0.98 (0.82-1.18)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.09 (0.12)	1.10 (0.87-1.38)
	55+	-0.13 (0.11)	0.88 (0.71-1.09)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.29* (0.14)	0.75 (0.57-0.99)
	D or E	-0.37** (0.15)	0.69 (0.52-0.92)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.90** (0.17)	2.45 (1.76-3.42)
	Tabloid readers only	0.19 (0.11)	1.21 (0.97-1.51)
	Both	0.71** (0.19)	2.03 (1.39-2.97)
	Local or other newspaper	0.36* (0.15)	1.43 (1.06-1.94)
	Constant	0.79** (0.17)	2.20

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q14b.	**How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in...the country as a whole?**

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining 'a great deal of influence' and 'a fair amount of influence' responses) or No ('not very much influence' and 'no influence all'), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,318

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	0.00 (0.09)	1.00 (0.85-1.18)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.10 (0.11)	1.11 (0.89-1.37)
	55+	0.06 (0.10)	1.06 (0.86-1.30)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.11 (0.13)	0.90 (0.70-1.15)
	D or E	-0.33* (0.13)	0.72 (0.55-0.93)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.69** (0.15)	1.99 (1.48-2.67)
	Tabloid readers only	0.12 (0.11)	1.13 (0.91-1.40)
	Both	0.69** (0.18)	1.99 (1.40-2.83)
	Local or other newspaper	0.28 (0.15)	1.32 (0.99-1.76)
	Constant	0.22 (0.16)	1.24

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q20.	**Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statement applies to. They look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians.** (Results for those who chose tabloids)

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (those who associated tabloid newspapers with this statement) or No (those who did not), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,397

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.09 (0.09)	0.92 (0.77-1.09)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.48** (0.11)	1.62 (1.30-2.02)
	55+	0.27* (0.11)	1.31 (1.07-1.61)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.43** (0.14)	0.65 (0.49-0.86)
	D or E	-0.91** (0.14)	0.40 (0.31-0.54)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.73** (0.16)	2.07 (1.52-2.81)
	Tabloid readers only	0.64** (0.11)	1.89 (1.53-2.35)
	Both	0.81** (0.19)	2.24 (1.56-3.23)
	Local or other newspaper	0.11 (0.14)	1.12 (0.84-1.48)
	Constant	0.49** (0.17)	1.64

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q20.	**Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statement applies to. They focus on negative stories about politics and politicians** (Results for those who chose tabloids)

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (those who associated tabloid newspapers with this statement) or No (those who did not), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,397

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.14 (0.09)	0.87 (0.73-1.04)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.41** (0.11)	1.51 (1.22-1.88)
	55+	0.27* (0.11)	1.31 (1.07-1.62)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.47** (0.14)	0.63 (0.47-0.83)
	D or E	-0.98** (0.15)	0.37 (0.28-0.50)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	1.09** (0.16)	2.98 (2.17-4.08)
	Tabloid readers only	0.79** (0.11)	2.19 (1.77-2.72)
	Both	0.97** (0.19)	2.64 (1.84-3.80)
	Local or other newspaper	0.34* (0.14)	1.40 (1.06-1.86)
	Constant	0.42* (0.17)	1.52

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q20.	**Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statement applies to. They are more interested in getting a story than telling the truth** (Results for those who chose tabloids)

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (those who associated tabloid newspapers with this statement) or No (those who did not), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,397

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.16 (0.09)	0.85 (0.71-1.02)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.54** (0.11)	1.72 (1.38-2.16)
	55+	0.37** (0.11)	1.44 (1.17-1.79)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.49** (0.15)	0.61 (0.45-0.82)
	D or E	-0.93** (0.15)	0.40 (0.29-0.53)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.95** (0.16)	2.58 (1.87-3.56)
	Tabloid readers only	0.79** (0.11)	2.20 (1.76-2.74)
	Both	1.01** (0.20)	2.76 (1.88-4.04)
	Local or other newspaper	0.42** (0.15)	1.52 (1.14-2.02)
	Constant	0.58** (0.18)	1.79

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q20.	**Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statement applies to. They do a good job keeping politicians accountable for their conduct** (Results for those who chose tabloids)

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (those who associated tabloid newspapers with this statement) or No (those who did not), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,397

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.28** (0.09)	0.75 (0.63-0.90)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	-0.09 (0.12)	0.92 (0.73-1.16)
	55+	0.42** (0.11)	1.52 (1.22-1.88)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	0.05 (0.13)	1.06 (0.81-1.37)
	D or E	-0.26 (0.14)	0.77 (0.58-1.01)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.04 (0.17)	1.04 (0.75-1.44)
	Tabloid readers only	0.71** (0.12)	2.03 (1.60-2.58)
	Both	0.53** (0.19)	1.70 (1.18-2.44)
	Local or other newspaper	0.32 (0.16)	1.38 (1.00-1.90)
	Constant	-1.14** (0.18)	0.32

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q20.	**Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statement applies to. They are generally fair in their representation of politicians** (Results for those who chose tabloids)

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (those who associated tabloid newspapers with this statement) or No (those who did not), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,397

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.22 (0.12)	0.80 (0.64-1.01)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.08 (0.16)	1.09 (0.80-1.47)
	55+	0.32* (0.14)	1.37 (1.03-1.83)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	0.30 (0.19)	1.35 (0.93-1.95)
	D or E	0.08 (0.20)	1.09 (0.74-1.59)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	-0.09 (0.26)	0.91 (0.55-1.52)
	Tabloid readers only	1.12** (0.17)	3.05 (2.18-4.28)
	Both	0.64* (0.26)	1.90 (1.15-3.14)
	Local or other newspaper	0.52* (0.23)	1.68 (1.08-2.63)
	Constant	-2.62** (0.25)	0.07

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q20.	**Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statement applies to. They help the public to learn about what is happening in politics** (Results for those who chose tabloids)

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (those who associated tabloid newspapers with this statement) or No (those who did not), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,397

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	0.03 (0.10)	1.03 (0.85-1.24)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.20 (0.13)	1.23 (0.96-1.57)
	55+	0.42** (0.12)	1.52 (1.21-1.93)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	0.06 (0.14)	1.07 (0.80-1.41)
	D or E	-0.11 (0.15)	0.90 (0.67-1.21)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.13 (0.18)	1.14 (0.80-1.64)
	Tabloid readers only	0.88** (0.13)	2.42 (1.87-3.14)
	Both	0.58** (0.20)	1.79 (1.21-2.65)
	Local or other newspaper	0.29 (0.18)	1.34 (0.95-1.90)
	Constant	-1.83** (0.19)	0.16

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q21a.	**In your opinion, how much influence does the media have on... how people vote?**

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining 'a great deal' and 'a fair amount' responses) or No ('not very much' and 'nothing at all'), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,216

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.36 (0.20)	0.70 (0.47-1.04)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.08 (0.24)	1.08 (0.68-1.72)
	55+	0.46 (0.25)	1.58 (0.97-2.57)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.51 (0.43)	0.60 (0.26- 1.38)
	D or E	-1.40** (0.41)	0.25 (0.11-0.56)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	1.24* (0.45)	3.47 (1.43-8.41)
	Tabloid readers only	0.59* (0.23)	1.81 (1.16-2.81)
	Both	1.11* (0.49)	3.03 (1.17-7.86)
	Local or other newspaper	0.75* (0.34)	2.11 (1.09-4.10)
	Constant	3.34** (0.46)	28.26

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q21c.	**In your opinion, how much influence does the media have on... the decisions politicians make?**

Binary variable in two categories: Yes (combining 'a great deal' and 'a fair amount' responses) or No ('not very much' and 'nothing at all'), excluding 'don't know' cases. n=2,182

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.25 (0.15)	0.78 (0.58-1.04)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	-0.13 (0.19)	0.88 (0.61-1.27)
	55+	-0.06 (0.18)	0.94 (0.66-1.35)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	0.01 (0.24)	1.01 (0.63-1.63)
	D or E	-0.66* (0.24)	0.52 (0.32-0.82)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.73* (0.29)	2.08 (1.19-3.65)
	Tabloid readers only	0.26 (0.18)	1.30 (0.92-1.84)
	Both	0.64* (0.33)	1.90 (1.00-3.64)
	Local or other newspaper	0.45 (0.26)	1.56 (0.95-2.58)
	Constant	2.43** (0.29)	11.39

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q23.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 1. Elected politicians would help the country more if they would stop talking and just take action on important problems. 2. What people call 'compromise' in politics is really just selling out one's principles. 3. Our government would run better if decisions were left up to successful business people. 4. Our government would run better if decisions were left up to non-elected, independent experts rather than politicians or the people.

Binary variable in two categories: Agrees with 'stealth' attitudes (agrees with two or more of the statements) or Disagrees with 'stealth' attitudes (agrees with one or none of the statements). Agreement combines 'strongly agree' and 'tend to agree' responses and Disagreement combines 'neither agree nor disagree', 'tend to disagree' and 'strongly disagree' responses. Excludes 'don't know' cases. n=1,175

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.09 (0.12)	0.91 (0.72-1.16)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.30 (0.16)	1.34 (0.99-1.83)
	55+	0.27 (0.15)	1.31 (0.98-1.76)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	0.12 (0.18)	1.13 (0.80-1.61)
	D or E	0.05 (0.19)	1.05 (0.73-1.52)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	-0.18 (0.20)	0.83 (0.56-1.24)
	Tabloid readers only	0.83** (0.16)	2.30 (1.68-3.15)
	Both	0.52* (0.23)	1.67 (1.07-2.62)
	Local or other newspaper	0.37 (0.21)	1.45 (0.96-2.20)
	Constant	-0.11 (0.23)	0.89

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Q26.	How did you vote in the last General Election held on 6 May 2010?

Binary variable in two categories: Voted and Did not vote, excluding refused responses and 'don't know' cases. n=2,199

Characteristics	Independent factors	Coefficient (SE)	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Gender	Male (Reference category)		
	Female	-0.10 (0.10)	0.90 (0.75-1.10)
Age (years)	18-34 (Reference category)		
	35-54	0.97** (0.11)	2.65 (2.12-3.32)
	55+	1.92** (0.13)	6.83 (5.32-8.76)
Social class	A or B (Reference category)		
	C1 or C2	-0.61** (0.16)	0.54 (0.39-0.75)
	D or E	-0.87** (0.17)	0.42 (0.30-0.58)
Print media readership	None (Reference category)		
	Broadsheet readers only	0.89** (0.18)	2.43 (1.72-3.45)
	Tabloid readers only	0.43** (0.12)	1.54 (1.21-1.96)
	Both	1.16** (0.21)	3.20 (2.12-4.81)
	Local or other newspaper	0.33* (0.16)	1.40 (1.01-1.92)
	Constant	0.02 (0.19)	1.02

** P < 0.05; **P < 0.01*

Appendix E: Qualitative focus groups

Location and Date	Recruitment	Number of Participants
London 16 November 2011	Gender mix 18-35 years old AB social grades Live in urban London (zones 1-6)	12
London 16 November 2011	Gender mix 36-70 years old DE social grades Live in urban London (zones 1-6)	9
Southampton 17 November 2011	Gender mix 18-35 years old AB social grades Live in urban Southampton	12
Southampton 17 November 2011	Gender mix 36-70 years old DE social grades Live in urban Southampton	12
Gildersome, Leeds 16 February 2012	Male Half 18-35 years old/Half 36-70 years old Social grade mix Live in rural area near Leeds	10
Gildersome, Leeds 16 February 2012	Female 18-35 years old DE social grades Live in rural area near Leeds	10
Newbury 20 February 2012	Gender mix 36-70 years old AB social grades Live in rural area near Newbury	11
Cardiff 27 February 2012	Female Half 18-35 years old/Half 36-70 years old Social grade mix Live in urban Cardiff	11

Location and Date	Recruitment	Number of Participants
Cardiff 27 February 2012	Gender mix Half 18-35 years old/Half 36-70 years old Half AB social grades/Half DE social grades Live in urban Cardiff	12
Dundee 1 March 2012	Gender mix 36-70 years old AB social grades Live in rural area on outskirts of Dundee	11
Edinburgh 5 March 2012	Gender mix 18-35 years old DE social grades Live in urban Edinburgh	10
Edinburgh 5 March 2012	Gender mix Half 18-35 years old/Half 36-70 years old Half AB social grades/Half DE social grades Live in urban Edinburgh	11
Newcastle 12 March 2012	Female Half 18-35 years old/Half 36-70 years old Social grade mix Live in rural area near Newcastle	11
Newcastle 12 March 2012	Male Half 18-35 years old/Half 36-70 years old Social grade mix Live in rural area near Newcastle	11
		TOTAL 153

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